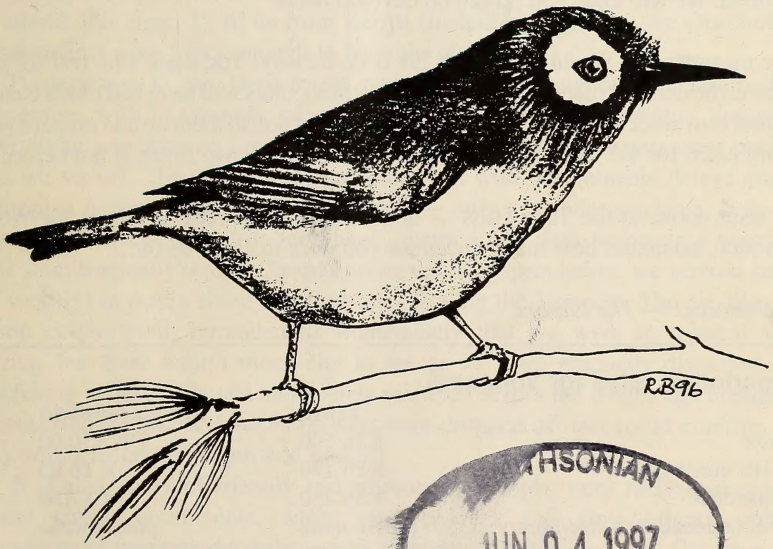
QL
691.K4
K45X
BIRD

Kenya Birds

ISSN 1023-3679

Volume 5, Number 2 January 1997

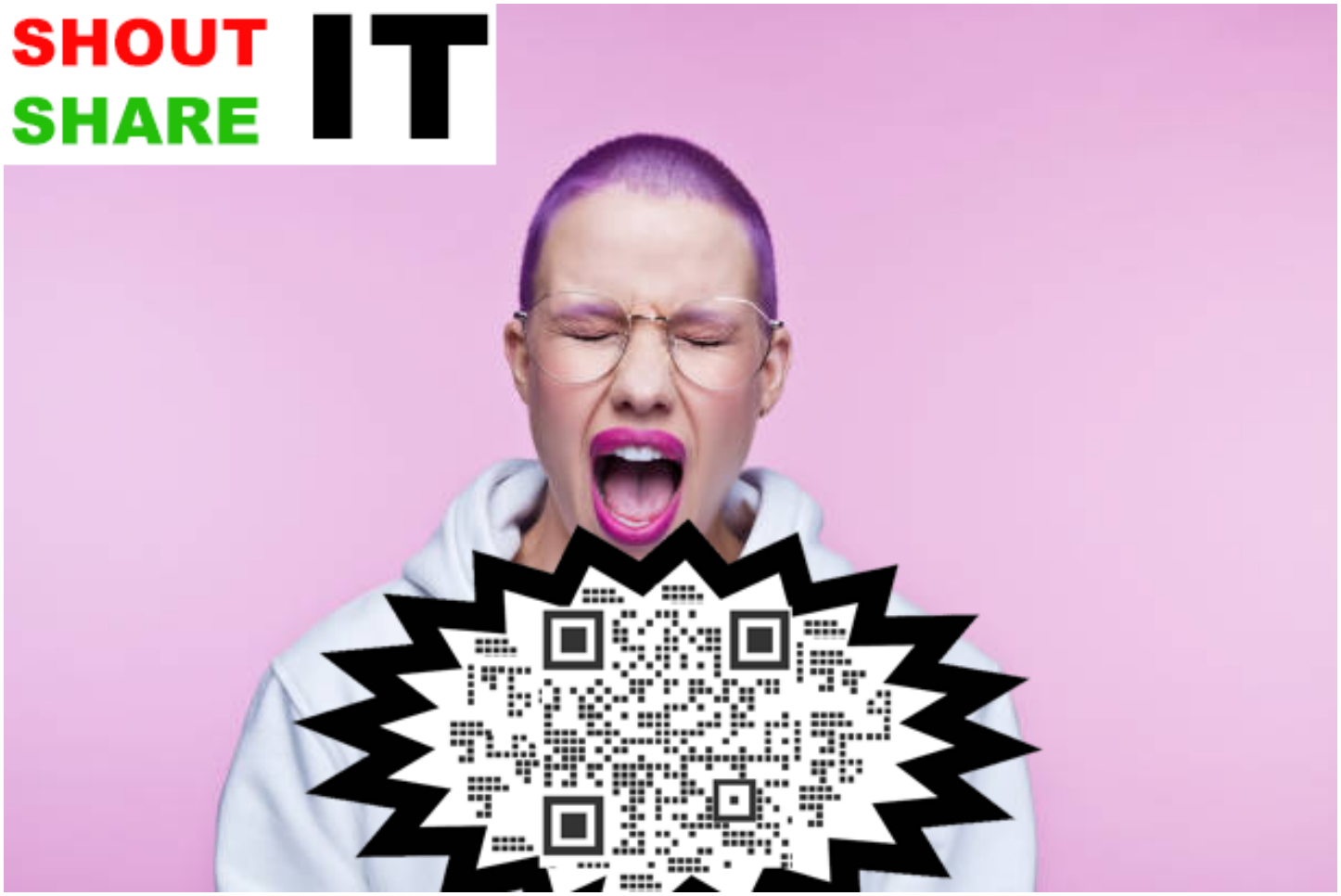


SMITHSONIAN
JUN 04 1997
LIBRARIES

A joint publication of the Department of Ornithology, National Museums of Kenya and BirdLife Kenya.

Editors: Leon Bennun, Colin Jackson and John Fanshawe

Department of Ornithology, National Museums of Kenya, P O Box 40658, Nairobi


SHOUT
SHARE
IT

Editorial

Although this issue deals with news and events up to January 1997, we want to mention a 'stop press' item here — in February 1997, the East Africa Natural History Society (Kenya) signed up as the full national Partner organisation of BirdLife International. The EANHS (Kenya) now joins its Uganda branch, the Ghana Wildlife Society, the Conservation Society of Sierra Leone, the Ethiopian Wildlife and Natural History Society, the Wildlife Conservation Society of Tanzania and BirdLife South Africa in the BirdLife African partnership.

With support from the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds (UK), the EANHS will this year be taking a critical look at its objectives and its structure. The idea is to set out clear goals, for conservation and for the Society itself, and plan realistic ways to reach them. Inevitably, birds will feature large in this planning process, and the role of BirdLife Kenya (an EANHS sub-committee) and *Kenya Birds* will be closely examined. We will keep you posted on developments.

In the meantime — World Birdwatch '97 is on its way! Yes, there's no rest for you dedicated birders out there. We doubt that your binoculars will have had much chance to gather dust since the NTT Bird Count last year, but polish them up and prepare your birding patch for 4-5 October. Instructions in the next *Kenya Birds*, if not before.

This issue looks at the Taita Hills — and no, you can't ALL go there for World Birdwatch, no matter how many endemics you want to clean up on...

Good birding! — *The Editors*

Subscription rates for Volume 6

	Kenya	*Abroad (airmail)*
Sponsor	KSh 500	UK £10.00
EANHS member	KSh 150	UK £6.00
Non-member	KSh 250	UK £7.50
Special (student/exchange/library)	*please write*	*please write*

Please make cheques payable to 'BirdLife Kenya'. Subscribers outside Kenya may pay in any convertible currency. Back issues are available at KSh 125/= each.

Please address all correspondence to: The Editors, **Kenya Birds**, Department of Ornithology, National Museums of Kenya, P O Box 40658 Nairobi, Kenya.

Front cover illustration: Taita White-eye *Zosterops (poliogaster) silvanus* by Roger Barnes. Typesetting and layout by BirdLife Kenya; printed by Omnia Printers, Nairobi.

News from Kenya and abroad

Department of Ornithology

PAOC 9

The Pan-African Ornithological Congress is the continent's biggest bird jamboree. Fundamentally it is, of course, a very serious scientific meeting, but it's much more besides: a conference for conservationists, a twitch-fest for manic birders, and a chance to meet, greet, dine and maybe even dance with people you've read about (and others you haven't) who are doing exciting work with birds all over Africa.

The PAOC happens every four years, and the ninth and latest took place in Accra, Ghana, from 1-8 December 1996. It's every African ornithologist's dream to attend: this time, 13 of us from Kenya (including nine from the Ornithology Department) were lucky enough to have the chance.

Preparations in the Department were feverish throughout the last half of November, with 14 scientific presentations to finish to a tight deadline. Somehow everything was done on time, the precious manuscripts and posters were packed, and we set off. The trip started inauspiciously, with interminable delays on our Ethiopian Airlines flight via Addis Ababa — only too understandable, since the company had lost one of its long-haul 'planes a few days before in a hijacking that went tragically wrong. Despite some nervous speculation, we arrived safely (if wearily) in Accra about 15 hours after leaving the Museum. The air, like hot, damp cotton-wool, reminded us immediately that we were in tropical West Africa, but there wasn't much else to see as we were gradually dispersed to a confusing variety of hotels and hostels scattered across the length and breadth of Accra. And Accra, as those of us who were dropped off last could confirm, is a city with substantial length and breadth.

It is also a city of friendly and enterprising people, trees and green spaces, grand public monuments, white sand beaches and grey Atlantic rollers, squadrons of inexpensive taxis — and gargantuan traffic jams. The Congress was held in the brand-new International Conference Centre, an impressive building indeed with its vast atrium opening onto a huge and magnificent mural of Ghanaian cultural life. We saw and heard a good deal of this cultural life over the week — drumming and dancing are taken very seriously in Ghana, and the conference was opened, closed and punctuated with magnificent displays, of a level of skill and accomplishment that left us gasping in admiration.

There were other cultural delights to be sampled — West African foods like garri, fufu, kenkey, jollof rice, red-red, palava sauce, and, for the more adventurous and extravagant, grass-cutter (which we call Cane Rat here!). Palm-

oil with everything, of course — Ghanaians were incredulous when told that we didn't cook with this in the East. By the final day all the male members of the Kenyan contingent were sporting dazzling kente-cloth waistcoats, appropriate attire for the Congress's closing banquet. Yet another superb dance troupe there: but they were unable to compete with the Long-tailed Nightjar that swooped down over the swimming pool, as if on cue, to ringing cheers from the serried ranks of ornithologists.

For birds, of course, were everyone's prime concern. The programme was exhausting, with the day-long scientific sessions supplemented by get-togethers of all sorts of committees and interest groups, both programmed and ad-hoc, often running late into the night. The organisation was generally excellent; a great deal of work was done; there were many fascinating presentations; and simply not enough time to meet and talk to all the people that one would have wanted to. Clearly, ornithology in Africa is thriving, and starting to get to grips with the challenging issues of conservation and management that are so important. Clearly, too, ornithology has a much firmer base within Africa than even a decade ago — but we have some way to go. The organisers had found sponsorship for over 70 African nationals to attend, a very impressive achievement, but almost all the remaining 250 plus delegates were from Europe or North America.

We all returned to Kenya fired up with new ideas and enthusiasm, and looking forward the next PAOC to be held in Tunisia in the year 2000. Thanks to the organisers for their splendid work, and to the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds, BirdLife International and the British Council, among others, for their very generous sponsorship.

Eremomelas are *Croton* fans

Turner's Eremomela, a globally Vulnerable species, is not the easiest bird in the world to study. It's small and inconspicuous, likes to be high in the canopy of the tallest forest trees, and has a call that isn't exactly deafening. Since October 1996, Kiptoo arap Kosgey, who is studying for his MPhil at the School of Environmental Studies, Moi University, has bravely been investigating the ecology of this challenging species in the South Nandi forest. The aim is to find out which parts of the forest the eremomela prefers, which trees it uses, and how it may respond to forest disturbance.

Apart from giving him a cricked neck, and supernaturally acute hearing, Kosgey's work has confirmed that South Nandi is probably the world's most important site for this species (as suggested by last year's IBA survey). Preliminary results show that the eremomela prefers the lower altitude parts of the forest, probably because these areas have more big *Croton* trees, for which the bird shows a clear preference.

Sadly, the study has also revealed just how bad a state South Nandi is in. While visiting Kosgey in December, Edward Waiyaki and Leon Bennun from the Ornithology Department saw for themselves the enormous damage that unrestrained logging is doing to the central part of the forest. Large numbers of *Croton,* in particular, are being removed. They were also amazed to see that the undergrowth in a vast part of the southern sector had been cleared and maize planted in its place — under the, as yet, unfelled trees. It is only a matter of a short time, it seems, before the entire southern, lower-altitude third of South Nandi ceases to be forest altogether. The loss of biodiversity will be immense — and the consequences for the eremomela may be particularly unhappy.

Kosgey's study has generously been supported by the People's Trust for Endangered Species and the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds.

Sandgrouse, mangroves and illadopses

The Department has kept up a busy fieldwork programme, despite the distractions of PAOC (see above). Alfred Simiyu continued his studies of sandgrouse populations on Mbirikani Group Ranch, focusing on waterhole counts as a census method. Heavy rains at the start of November inundated the whole study area and put a stop to data collection until the next dry season, in January — not suprisingly, sandgrouse don't bother to fly tens of kilometres to drink when the entire ranch is under water! In November, Oliver Nasirwa and Peter Njoroge, with Fleur Ng'weno of the EANHS, conducted a Malindi-based training course for waterbird counters from Kenya Wildlife Service and the Kenya Marine and Fisheries Research Institute. A smaller team then continued to carry out a thorough survey, by boat, of mangrove creeks in Lamu District. Joseph Oyugi was busy with intensive field work on Kakamega forest bird populations from September to December. He is looking at the effects of fragmentation and isolation on the numbers of particular species, complementing the approach of Thomas Brooks' project 'How long will it take us to lose biodiversity?' (see *Kenya Birds* 5(1)). Brooks and his team spent October and November on Mt Kenya, completing their survey of forest fragments on the south-western flank. Oyugi now joins Brooks in Tennessee for six months of data analysis, along with John Kageche who is putting together his research proposal on the Taita White-eye.

BirdLife Kenya

'Birds and people'

On 29 October 1996, BirdLife Kenya and the Ornithology Department organised a one-day seminar with the theme 'Birds and people', at the National Museums of Kenya. The aim was to come up with concrete suggestions for conserving threatened birds that share their habitats intimately with people.

More than 50 people took part. In the first session, the results of research and conservation projects supported by BirdLife Kenya were presented by those who are carrying out the work. Later, there were open discussions focusing on two separate conservation issues: threatened birds in agricultural landscapes, and colonially-nesting water-birds.

The following presentations were made:

- Distribution and habitat choice of the threatened East Coast Akalat in Arabuko-Sokoke Forest — *Paul Matiku, School of Environmental Studies, Moi University.*
- Nairobi Ringing Group — *Colin Jackson, Ornithology Department, National Museums of Kenya.*
- The conservation biology of Sharpe's Longclaw, a Kenya grassland endemic- *Muchai Muchane, Wildlife Management Department, Moi University.*
- The status and conservation of Hinde's Babbler, a threatened Kenya endemic — *Peter Njoroge, Ornithology Department, National Museums of Kenya.*
- Pink-backed Pelicans nesting at Rakewa: reconciling conflicts of interest — *Joab Omondi & Paul Onyango, Lake Victoria Wetlands Team.*
- The Ahero Heronries: problems and possibilities — *Jeam Agutu, Maseno School.*

How do we conserve threatened birds in an agricultural landscape?

Sharpe's Longclaw and Hinde's Babbler are Kenyan endemic species that live in a landscape that has been taken over by agriculture. Pressure on the land is ever-increasing as the human population grows, so the immediate problem these birds face is loss of habitat (short grassland with tussocks for the longclaw, thickets (now mainly *Lantana*) for the babbler). The babbler is also hunted and eaten in some parts of its small range.

Suggestions included: conservation education for schools, local people and decision-makers; investigating and encouraging ecologically-friendly agricultural practices; ecological engineering to produce more suitable habitat; compensation or incentives for people who spare habitats for these birds; and establishing networks of small protected areas (private sanctuaries, school compounds and so on). More research was needed on (i) key aspects of the species' ecology; (ii) the

economics of conservation (changes in grazing practice, setting aside fallow land); and (iii) possible pesticide effects on the birds. There was also a need for an explicit government policy for conservation of endemic and/or threatened species, and appropriate legal restrictions on what people can do with their land.

How do we conserve colonially-nesting waterbirds?

Discussion centred on two waterbird colonies near Lake Victoria: the Pink-backed Pelican colony at Rakewa and the heronries at Ahero. In both cases there is a conflict between people and birds. At Rakewa the birds use space that people want for agricultural use, and a number of nest trees have already been cut down. However, the local community is sympathetic to the idea of a bird sanctuary as a potential tourist attraction. At Ahero, the breeding birds are a nuisance to people: they are noisy and smelly, their presence attracts pests and causes health problems. Many nest trees have been cut and the remaining ones are too small to support the number of birds wanting to nest. The local community would like the birds removed. *(See article in this issue.)* In the case of the Pink-backed Pelicans the following suggestions were made:

- Fund and support the existing self-help group at Rakewa.
- Buy up the land used by the birds.
- Include the area in the Western Kenya tourist circuit.
- Encourage appreciation and documentation of the cultural heritage in the area.
- Use the more enlightened people from the area to educate others on the importance of the site.
- Buy, rent or otherwise protect the trees used by the birds
- Make an economic valuation of the sites.
- Investigate what the trees need for their continued survival.
- Plant new trees/protect saplings.
- Exploit the guano produced by the birds as a fertiliser.
- Initiate awareness programmes.

The following suggestions were made in the case of Ahero:

- Shift people away from the birds' nesting trees.
- Construct artificial nesting platforms away from the village.
- Shift the colony away from the present sites, e.g. by planting fast-growing trees and/or producing artificial nest platforms
- Create awareness through the Wildlife Clubs of Kenya (WCK) by use of club patrons who can mobilise students for this purpose.

Thanks to all the participants and speakers for a lively day of information and debate. We hope that the outcome will help shape funding proposals for the conservation of these species and sites.

NTT World Bird Count

The second NTT World Bird Count (sponsored by the Nippon Telegraph and Telephone Corporation took place from 28 September to 13 October 1996. In Kenya, 65 participants sent in 'National Birdmap' forms, which were compiled into a final list for NTT.

Eighty-one countries took part, and the result was a staggering 5,317 bird species recorded — well over half the world's total! NTT has now donated $53,170 to BirdLife International for bird conservation. This is almost twice as much as was raised last year. No fewer than 80,694 people were out birding across the world over the two weeks.

Kenya's birders did a great job, recording 651 species in total. With the entry of several South American countries into the event, however, we shall have to try even harder in future years. In 1993 and 1995, we recorded more species than any other country, but last year we were relegated to fourth place, behind Peru (with an astonishing 958 species), Ecuador and Brazil. These countries have some of the longest bird lists in the Neotropical region (Central and South America), which itself contains about twice as many bird species as the Afrotropics, so we have no reason not to feel proud of our performance!

Which are Africa's most commonly seen species? The top ten across the continent, in descending order, were Black Kite, Common Bulbul, Red-eyed Dove, Cattle Egret, Laughing Dove, Common Sandpiper, Common Fiscal, Tawny-flanked Prinia, Grey Heron and Speckled Mousebird. No surprises there — but only Black Kite and Grey Heron make it into the ten with the most records for the world, at numbers eight and ten respectively. Top of the list, with 720 records, is (perhaps a little surprisingly) the Eurasian Tree Sparrow *Passer montanus*.

The most widespread species seen during the event were Barn Swallow (recorded in 58 countries from Australia to Zimbabwe), Great Egret (57 countries), Common Moorhen (52), House Sparrow (51) and Cattle Egret (51).

Thanks again, and well done, to all those who took part in Kenya!

World Birdwatch '97 — "1,111 birds under threat"

This year's World Birdwatch takes place on 4-5 October 1997. It is going to be a particularly special event, since BirdLife is 75 years old this year (see above). The focus this year is on the 1,111 species of birds that are under global threat of extinction — 22 or so of which occur in Kenya. NTT will be maintaining their commitment to donate $10 for every bird species seen (see above, too), so it's bins out and into the field for every Kenyan birder. More details in due course — fill in your diary and watch this space!

Ornithological Sub-committee

Ngulia 1996

The Ngulia Ringing Group had another very successful season — the second-best ever in terms of the numbers of birds ringed (over 18,300 birds), although not quite in the same class as 1995. The weather in November was poor and the start of the season very slow; the first half of December proved excellent, but the rains then petered out and the team left earlier than planned after several days of no mist and little activity.

Two controls (recaptures of ringed birds) were outstanding. The first was a Marsh Warbler from the Netherlands on 17 November 1997, the second a River Warbler from the Czech Republic, probably the very first tropical recovery or control of this skulking species. Two birds from last season, a Sprosser and a Tree Pipit, also put in an appearance again.

Thirty-six Palaearctic species were ringed, the third highest total ever. Still, several Ngulia rarities were missing — including Little Bittern, Eurasian Golden Oriole and Wood Warbler. The first Eurasian Swift to be ringed in eastern Africa was flick-netted on 7 December.

Financial support for this year's ringing came from the Wetlands Trust and British Airways. With support from the Kenya Museum Society, a Kenyan team from the Ornithology Department was able to take part again this year for sessions in both November and December.

Scopus awakes...

Contrary to rumour in some quarters, *Scopus* is not dead — it has only been resting for a while. Various problems delayed the publication of issue 19(2), but this is now with the press, and material for volume 20, and the backlog of annual bird reports, is being processed. Publication of a bumper vol. 20 issue is expected mid-year. Meanwhile, to speed up the editorial process and maintain high standards, the OS-c has appointed an Editorial Board for the journal. Board members will correspond with authors and ensure that manuscripts are refereed and edited rapidly. The initial Board is as follows: Graeme Backhurst (Editor), Don Turner, Derek Pomeroy, David Pearson, Luc Lens, John Fanshawe, Leon Bennun and John Ashe. For back-issues and subscriptions to *Scopus*, contact Don Turner, OS-c Treasurer/Secretary, at P O Box 48019, Nairobi (tel. 48133).

International

BirdLife fills key post

BirdLife has recruited Dr Marco Lambertini as the Director of the new Network and Programme Department, which was created as part of the recent structural changes in the Secretariat. For the last six years, Marco has been the head of BirdLife's Italian partner, Lega Italiana Protezione (LIPU). His effectiveness in this key new role will no doubt be enhanced by his fluency in Italian, Spanish, French and English (though not yet Kiswahili!).

Warbler name saves forest

A totally new species of bird, discovered in 1991 in Colombia, is to be formally named *Vireo masteri* after Dr Bernard Master, an American businessman, Chairman of Health Power HMO, who has made a major donation to BirdLife International for the honour of having the bird named after him.

Vireo masteri is a member of the vireo family. It is a small yellow, olive and green bird and mostly feeds on insects. The formal description of the bird, previously known only as the Chocó Vireo after the region where it was found, recently appeared in the leading ornithological journal *Ibis*.

Dr Master's generous donation will pay for ongoing conservation work in the Colombian forests of Rio Nambi, home to the newly discovered bird. The project there involves the establishment of Latin America's first locally-owned forest reserve.

Traditionally, newly discovered birds are named by the person who discovers them. However, Paul Salaman, who was a 19-year old undergraduate student when he discovered the vireo in 1991, and American ornithologist Dr Gary Stiles, who independently found the bird the following year, quickly realised that unless urgent conservation action was taken, the biologically rich forest where the vireo lives would be developed and disappear. This prompted their decision to ask BirdLife International to use the naming opportunity to raise funds.

BirdLife International therefore announced the opportunity for a company or individual who donated the most to the vireo's conservation to have the bird named after them.

Dr Master was presented with a painting of the vireo, and received special commendation for his donation from HRH Prince Bernhard of the Netherlands of a ceremony at Royal Palace in Luxembourg on 20 September during a meeting of BirdLife's Rare Bird Club. The Rio Nambi Community Nature Reserve, in south-westernmost Colombia, where the bird was found, now protects an enormous diversity of flora and fauna, including over 300 bird species, eight

globally threatened birds, notably the Plumbeous Forest-falcon *Micrastur plumbeus*, and 51 Chocó Endemic Bird Area species; one of the world's greatest concentrations of endemic birds for a single site.

New and additional? International aid and biodiversity conservation

One of the promises made by the world's wealthy countries at the 1992 Rio 'Earth Summit' was to make 'new and additional' resources to support biodiversity conservation in the developing countries. A new report from BirdLife International (*New and additional? Financial resources for biodiversity conservation in developing countries 1987-1994*) suggests that this promise has not been kept. The report finds that systems for tracking donors' fulfilment of their obligations under the Biodiversity Convention and Agenda 21 are highly inadequate. However, total aid for biodiversity conservation has fallen, despite the launch of the Global Environment Facility. Neither has there been an increase in the proportion of overall aid going to sectors that have some relevance to biodiversity. Most developing countries are still so shackled by debt and the constraints of structural adjustment policies that they are unable (even if they wanted to) to make serious investments in biodiversity conservation.

This will all sound depressingly familiar to many people — so let us hope that some of the report's clear and useful recommendations will filter through to the men (and women) in grey suits in Washington and Brussels.

Happy Birthday, BirdLife

In June 1997 BirdLife International will be 75 years old. Having started life as the International Committee for Bird Preservation in a small London house in 1922, BirdLife now has Partner organisations in over 60 countries, and is a national force in a further 25 countries — giving it a world-wide membership of over 1,500,000 individuals who are concerned about the need to conserve the world's birds. Here are some of the highlights, decade by decade, of three quarters of a century working in international bird conservation.

1922 First meeting of International Committee for Bird Protection on 22 June in London. The 11 founding members met in a London house, initiated by Dr Gilbert Pearson, the President of the National Audubon Society, with the aim of creating a network of conservation minded organisation uniting in a common cause. After the meeting, Pearson travelled widely across Europe seeking and gaining support from national conservation organisations. The two issues of major concern to ICBP were marine oil pollution and the bird trade, issues that still refuse to be removed from the bird conservation agenda.

1920s Name change to International Committee for Bird Preservation. Stopped large exportations of Tinamou (gamebirds) from Argentina. In Australia, achieved regulation of live bird exports, and representation on the Advisory Committee dealing with licences. Adopted a resolution "calling on the Nations of the World to study carefully the status of their birdlife and to take necessary steps to maintain at all times an adequate supply of native birds". Concern over species being decimated for millinery trade, such as Crowned Pigeon and Birds of Paradise. Identified egg collecting, hunting in breeding and nesting periods, migratory birds and oil pollution as priorities for action.

1930s 203 members and National Sections in 23 countries. "The preservation of wildlife is not the problem of any one country alone, it is an intricate international problem". Achieved revisions to the (1902) Paris Treaty for Bird Protection.

1933 Protection of Birds Act passed in UK, concerning capture of and trade in wild birds. Resolution to urge governments of Europe and North Africa to prohibit the import, export and transit of Quail *Coturnix coturnix* for at least three years because of declines in breeding. Resolution on destruction caused by DDT spraying. Chairman of British Section awarded medal by the Royal Swedish Academy of Sciences.

1935 Phyllis Barclay-Smith appointed to run a sub-secretariat in London. The Secretary of ICBP, Count Leon Lippen, was based in Brussels.

1940s

1945 Phyllis Barclay-Smith made Secretary and Secretariat established in London. By then, some 34 national sections had formed.

1947 ICBP instrumental in setting up the International Wildfowl Research Institution.

1948 Duck Adoption Scheme started. Raised nearly $575 in second year (equivalent to $11,000 in 1995).

1950s 45 National Sections. Oil pollution a priority for action; in 1954/55, International Convention for the Protection of the Pollution of the Sea by Oil passed. Recognised the need to conserve the Camargue (Rhône Delta) because of its international importance. Meetings in Caracas, Venezuela (1952) and Bulawayo, Rhodesia (1957). Active against pesticide spraying.

1952 ICBP asked to gather data on the status of birds "in danger of extinction". First report in 1957 'Preservation of Birds on the Danger

List'. Coto Donana in Spain recognised as an important bird area, home to the Imperial Eagle.

1953 International Convention for the Protection of Birds signed by 12 countries (but not the UK).

1959 Name change to International Council for Bird Preservation

1960s Toxic chemicals recognised as the most serious problem for ICBP.

1960 Lord Hurcomb, Chairman, suggested the idea of 'national birds'. Robin declared for UK in December. Protested successfully at the sale in UK of tinned sparrows from Japan as cocktail delicacies.

1962 Sent supportive letters to assist the Cyprus Ornithological Society in securing the reserve of Akrotiri Salt Lake.

1963 Liaison Officer appointed to work with other conservation NGOs at IUCN HQ in Switzerland. UK House of Lords increased the list of species of birds for which it was an offence to take eggs.

1966 Appeal to Maltese Prime Minister saved Pool of Ghadira on Malta from development — an important site for migrant waders. First marketing tool — greeting card with Robin on front. First Red Data Book published.

1967 TV appeal by Sir Peter Scott raised $25,000. All major oil companies contributed to production and distribution of a description of the LOAD ON TOP system aimed at reducing oil pollution. Torrey Canyon disaster. Campaign prevented Aldabra Atoll, Seychelles from becoming an early-warning station with an RAF base.

1968 Successful world-wide appeal (with WWF) to buy Cousin Island in the Seychelles to safeguard the Seychelles Brush Warbler *Acrocephalus sechellensis*. Raised $17,000. DDT, HCH, Aldrin & Dieldrin banned after 20 years of campaigning.

1969 Indian National Section achieved Government ban on export of feathers and skins of Grey Junglefowl. Publication of 12 postcards in six languages entitled "Help to Save the Birds of Prey".

1970s

1970 World Working Group on Birds of Prey and Owls set up at ICBP World Conference.

1974 At XVI ICBP World Conference, Australian and Japanese Governments signed agreement to protect migratory birds and birds in danger of extinction and their environment. 63 national sections. Action to protect oystercatchers in South Wales due to be severely culled because of competition with cockle fishermen.

1975 First world conference on Birds of Prey. Organised by ICBP in Vienna supported by UNEP, Council of Europe, EEC, IUCN, WWF and others.

1976 UK ratified CITES and Ramsar. Appeals and Publicity Committee organised a reception at New Zealand House by invitation of Martini Rossi Ltd. EEC Draft Directive to make bird legislation uniform.

1977 Destruction of migrating terns in West Africa continued to be a primary concern. Migratory Birds campaign raised $7,000, of which $3,000 given to Tunisian government to protect Lake Ichkeul, North Africa's most important wetland for wintering waterfowl.

1978 Phyllis Barclay-Smith retired as Hon. Secretary. First successful translocation of Seychelles Magpie-robins from Fregate to Aride. ICBP Secretariat offered new premises in Gland, Switzerland with IUCN and WWF which the ExCon recommended be accepted. Work began to identify main bird conservation needs in line with IUCN's World Conservation Strategy. Amoco Cadiz oil spill off Brittany. Oil spill at Sullom Voe, Shetland.

1979 EEC Directive on Bird Conservation agreed; came into force in 1981. World Birdwatch magazine launched. With ICBP input, European Committee for the Conservation of Nature and Natural Resources issued first draft of Threatened Birds in Europe.

1980 Dr Christoph Imboden appointed as ICBP's first full-time member of staff. Secretariat moved to Cambridge. Phyllis Barclay-Smith Memorial Appeal launched, which raised $C9,000.

1981 Dillon Ripley: "Our dedication arises from a conviction that in preserving birds we are preserving ourselves".

1982 Recognition that Sections' work would become more international. XVIII World Conference in Cambridge, UK.

1985 First mention of Important Bird Areas at European Continental Section Meeting. Publication of Threatened Birds of Africa and related islands — a Red Data book with a geographically defined approach.

1986 Rediscovery of Gurney's Pitta and establishment of conservation project in Thailand. The Conservation Expedition Competition was established. Two-year IBA Programme for Europe announced.

1987 ICBP 'Save the Birds' global public awareness campaign. Book of same name published in 10 languages. Bali Starling conservation programme started in Indonesia. 'Save the Seashore Birds Project' launched by ICBP, RSPB and Ghanaian government. Kilum Mountain Forest project launched in Cameroon. Establishment of Turkish NGO by organisations (which later became BirdLife Partners) in Denmark, Netherlands,

Sweden and the UK. Project launched to conserve the Slender-billed Curlew — population down to less than 1000.

1988 World Bird Club launched by ICBP Secretariat. Largest ever land purchase in Europe by a voluntary conservation organisation (RSPB of Abernethy Forest, UK at $1.8 m). Launch of Biodiversity Project to identify global hotshots for biodiversity conservation. Publication of 'Birds to watch', the list of the world's threatened birds. 'Wings around the world' initiative — ICBP working with 350 organisations from 115 countries.

1989 Publication of Important Bird Areas in Europe, with information on 2,444 sites, most of which were unprotected and unmanaged. ICBP 'Protect the Parrots' campaign, lobbying EEC to reduce importation. ICBP Conservation Programme contains 63 full and 9 endorsed projects; 80% in developing countries.

1990s

1990 Dispersed Species project launched to identify species of European Conservation Concern (published in 1994).

1991 ICBP signs agreement with 15 Lead Organisations — now part of the network — 'to ensure ICBP makes an effective contribution to world conservation' (Christoph Imboden). Launch of Important Bird Areas project for Middle East. Palas Valley project launched in Pakistan. EU Habitats Directive adopted — a milestone in European conservation history. Office opened in Bogor, launching ICBP Indonesia Programme.

1992 A new NGO, OTOP, formed in Poland, as part of the ICBP 'Wings across Europe' programme. Publication of 'Putting biodiversity on the map', identifying the 221 areas in the world with the highest concentrations of unique species, and 'Threatened birds of the Americas', a second regional Red Data Book.

1993 Change to BirdLife International on 1 March. Nearly 20 Partners had signed up. Launch of Important Bird Areas project for Africa. Menderes Delta in Turkey designated as National Park after campaign by DHKD, BirdLife Partner in Turkey. First WORLD BIRDWATCH EVENT held in October, with over 200 organisations taking part. EC approved the Zonal Programme (led by SEO, BirdLife Partner in Spain) for environmental farming in the Spanish Steppes. Following pressure by BirdLife Malta, strict laws governing bird hunting introduced in Malta.

1994 Cypriot government banned spring shooting of birds after 165,000 RSPB (UK) members lobbied MEPs. XXI World Conference in Rosenheim, Germany — the first as BirdLife International; 14 more organisations

signed up as Partners. New mission statement: "To conserve all bird species on earth and their habitats, and through this, to work for the world's biological diversity and the sustainability of human use of natural resources". Launch of the new BirdLife Conservation Series of books. Receipt of Amsterdam Prize for the Environment for work on Endemic Bird Areas. Initiation of World Bird Database project. The Wild Bird Society of Japan (BirdLife Partner) bought a reserve to protect the threatened Red-crowned Crane. 'Birds to Watch 2', the revised world red data book, was published.

1995 Development of BCIS (Biodiversity Conservation Information System) with IUCN, Wetlands International, WCMC and others. BirdLife Network comprised 21 Partners, 37 Partners Designate, 26 Representatives, 30 Associates and staff in over 20 nations. WORLD BIRDWATCH '97 weekend united over 150,000 people and 177 organisations. Official designation of first Important Bird Area for the Americas. Species Action Plans (SAPs) produced for 23 species in Europe. Following pressure by SEO (BirdLife Partner in Spain), a new national park was designated in the Spanish Steppes. OTOP (BirdLife Partner in Poland) opened a new reserve to help protect Aquatic Warblers.

1996 The Ke Go Nature Reserve in Vietnam received official protection — a reward for the BirdLife Vietnam Programme. The Indonesia office produced 'Conserving Indonesian Biodiversity: the Endemic Bird Area Approach'. The scientific name of a new bird species was sold to raise money for conservation in Colombia.

1997 300th member of the Rare Bird Club, launched in 1988. Seven full Partners in Africa, including the EANHS in Kenya and Uganda.

Peter's Twinspot — Roger Barnes

Birding in... the Taita Hills

Thomas Brooks, Jim Barnes, Roger Barnes,
John Kageche and Christine Wilder
P O Box 40658, Nairobi

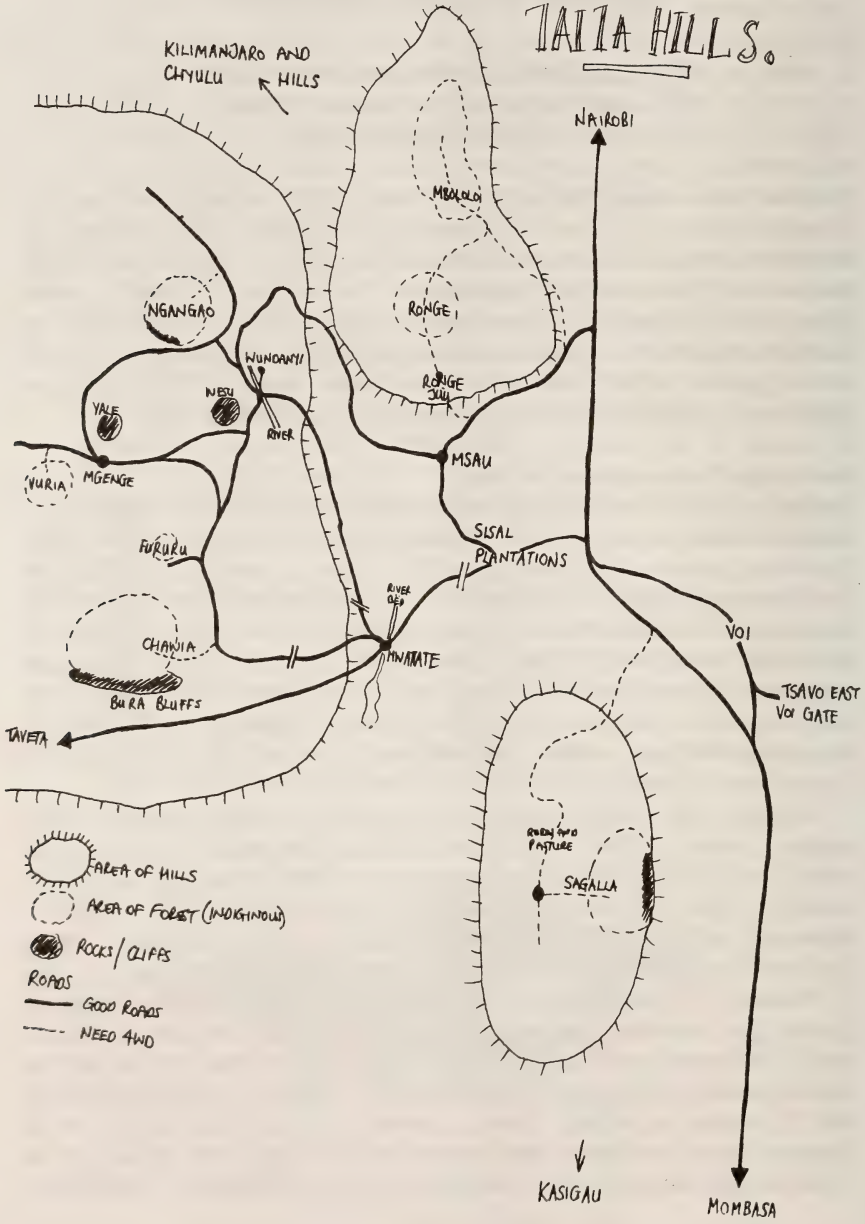
For those keen on searching for rare and unusual birds, a visit to the Taita Hills of southern Kenya is a must. The remaining forest patches of the area hold no less than three endemic species, all of which are listed as "critical" by BirdLife International, plus numerous other species that are hard to find or absent elsewhere in Kenya, or that have endemic subspecies in the Taita Hills. Yet another attraction of the Taita Hills is its biogeographical uniqueness, for the hills hold a peculiar mix of birds from three distinct areas: the Central Kenyan highlands, the northern Tanzanian mountains, and the Kenyan coast.

How to get there and where to stay

Anyone who has driven the Nairobi-Mombasa road knows how imposing the Taita Hills look looming over the town of Voi, between Tsavo East and West. From here, access to most of the Taita Hills is in fact surprisingly easy. Take the Voi-Taveta road (A23), which leaves the main road by the BP and Caltex petrol stations in Voi, and follow it 23 km to Mwatate. Here turn right onto the Wundanyi road (C104), which climbs up into the hills allowing spectacular views over Voi and Tsavo East, along with a first glimpse of forest on the hill-tops, and reaches Wundanyi after 18 km. All of the roads up to Wundanyi are tarmaced and in good condition. Frequent matatus run from Voi to Wundanyi and charge about KSh 100.

Wundanyi (the district capital) is a pleasant town with numerous shops, kiosks, a market, a Shell petrol station, a Kenya Commercial Bank and a post office. The Hill View Hotel offers single rooms for KSh 250 per night and double rooms for KSh 400, with hot showers. The District Forest Office is also in Wundanyi, and it would be polite to drop in here if you are planning to stay in the forest for very long—the forester, Ms Mdamu, is very helpful.

Wundanyi is the starting point for visiting the forests of Ngangao, Vuria and Chawia, plus a number of other smaller forests. Ngangao lies about 10 km due north of Wundanyi: to reach this forest cross the bridge at Wundanyi and take the murram road that winds up through shambas into the hills, turning right at the only T-junction (at a small shopping centre) up to the ridge crest south of Ngangao forest. Once on the ridge, either drive (4WD necessary) or walk up the 1 km dirt track along the ridge to the forest (100 ha, 1700-2000 m). The forest is


TAITA HILLS.
KILIMANJARO AND CHYULU HILLS
NAIROBI
MBololo
RONGE I
RONGE 2
NGANGAO
WUNDANYI
RIVER
YALE
WESU
VURIA
MGENGE
MSAU
SISAL PLANTATIONS
FURURU
RIVER DEF
CHAWIA
MWATATE
BURA BLUFFS
TAVETA
VOI
TSAVO EAST
VOI GATE
SAGALLA
KASIGAU
MOMBASA
AREA OF HILLS
AREA OF FOREST (INDIGINOUS)
ROCKS/CLIFFS
ROADS
GOOD ROADS
NEED 4WD

a long strip running north-south, with the forest guard's houses (where camping is allowed) at the southern end and pine plantations on the northern, western and southern edges.

Two small towns to the west of Wundanyi, Wesu (lying below Wesu hill) and Mgenge (below Yale hill), are the access points to Vuria and Chawia. To reach these turn west on the murram road by the bridge in Wundanyi (turning left at the T-junction on the road up to Ngangao also brings you to Mgenge). To reach Vuria, at 2,200 m the highest peak in the Taita Hills, continue west through Mgenge and then take a steep turn south up the northern flank of the mountain, up to the radio tower at the top (4WD necessary). Very little natural forest remains on Vuria, although wonderful views in all directions can be had from the peak. To reach Chawia, bear south on the murram road out of Wundanyi, passing through several small shopping centres and under Fururu and Susu hills. This road meets another murram road (E687) coming up from the Mwatate-Wundanyi road, and then winds up to Bura Bluffs (1,500 m), the dramatic cliffs on the southern edge of the Taita Hills, which are topped by Chawia forest (about 50 ha). Matatus are frequent on all of the murram roads between Wundanyi, Wesu and Mgenge, and anybody will give you directions if you get lost!

Sagalla hill lies isolated from the main Taita Hills massif, due south of Voi. To reach Sagalla, follow the main road south of Voi for 2 km to the turn-off onto a murram road which climbs about 10 km south-west up the hill to Sagalla town (frequent matatus ply this route). Sagalla forest (5 ha) lies 3 km to the south of the town (walk or drive a 4WD up a dirt track), on the ridge top at 1,500 m, and is surrounded by extensive pine plantations. The eastern edge of the forest provides magnificent views out towards Aruba Dam and Mt Kasigau.

The most difficult forest to access is Mbololo, requiring either a 4WD or a long, steep walk. The easiest access to the base of Mbololo hill is to turn off the Nairobi-Mombasa road 2 km north of Voi and drive about 15 km along a murram road towards the small town of Msau (Msau can also be reached by murram road by driving east from Wundanyi, or north from the Voi-Mwatate road). Many matatus take these routes, but none climb the poor road up the hill to the village of Ronge Juu (about 5 km through thorn scrub). There is a large forest station in Ronge Juu (the forester, Mr. Mwakwida, is very friendly), administering the huge pine plantation here, but very few other services are available. There are a few tiny patches of heavily-disturbed indigenous forest (Mwabira and Ronge) left along valleys within the plantation (1,200 m). To reach Mbololo, a number of dirt tracks continue steeply uphill from Ronge Juu for about 3 km up onto the ridge top. Mbololo forest (about 200 ha) cloaks this ridge (1,700-2,000 m) and runs considerably lower on the eastern flank, dropping down to merge into thorn scrub at about 1,200 m.

The endemics

The rarest of the three Taitas endemics is the Taita Thrush *Turdus (olivaceus) helleri*, which is restricted to the shady understorey of dense forest in Ngangao, Chawia and Mbololo. It is commonest at Mbololo, but given the difficulty of access to this site, it is probably easiest sought at Ngangao. The species is most easily located by listening for the rustling as it tosses over leaves on the forest floor. Birds become very active at dusk, singing and often chasing each other, calling excitedly.

The Taita Apalis *Z. fuscigularis* is also quite difficult to locate. It is only found in the western Taitas: Ngangao, Chawia, Vuria and intervening small patches of forest. It is not really a true forest species, being commonest in the dense understorey along the forest edge. It is a skulker, difficult to see, but, with its distinctive song of rapidly repeated scolding notes, easily heard. While the taxonomic status of this form is uncertain—although very distinct, some still believe it to be a race of the Bar-throated Apalis *Z. thoracica*—the only other Kenyan locality for any Bar-throateds is the Chyulu Hills, 50 km north-west of the Taitas.

The final endemic, the Taita White-eye *Zosterops silvanus* (sometimes regarded as a race of the Montane White-eye *Z. poliogaster*), is easy to see. It is probably the commonest forest bird across the Taita Hills, occurring even in tiny scraps of forest as low as Wundanyi. At times it forms mixed flocks on the forest

Taita Apalis — *Roger Barnes*

edge with Abyssinian White-eyes, although it is easily identified by its grey underparts and broad white eye-ring. Note that the Taita White-eye is absent from Sagalla (although it is reported to occur on Mt Kasigau).

Species rare in Kenya

Besides the three endemics, two other species listed in "Birds to Watch 2" occur in the Taita Hills. One, the Abbott's Starling, was present in Chawia in July and August 1996, along with large flocks of both Sharpe's and Violet-backed Starlings. It seems likely that this poorly-known species is a wanderer to the Taita (and Chyulu) Hills from Mt Kilimanjaro, but it may be a scarce resident; more information is needed. There is a single record of the "Near Threatened" Southern Banded Snake-Eagle from July 1996 in Chawia, and it seems likely that this species is also a visitor to the Taita Hills from the coast.

Two species only barely reaching Kenya from the Tanzanian mountains are common in the moist forest of the Taita Hills: Stripe-cheeked Greenbul and Yellow-throated Woodland-Warbler. Both species are best looked for in Ngangao, but are also present in Chawia, Mbololo and several smaller forests such as Fururu. Another mainly Tanzanian species, the Orange Ground Thrush, is present in deep forest in Ngangao and Mbololo, although it seems to be scarcer than the Taita Thrush.

Other species

There are also a number of more widespread species of high montane forest which are easily seen in the Taita Hills. Mountain Buzzard, Lemon Dove, Hartlaub's Turaco, Cabanis's (Placid) Greenbul, White-starred Robin, Rüppell's Robin-Chat, African Dusky Flycatcher, Evergreen Forest Warbler, Sharpe's Starling and Eastern Double-collared Sunbird can all be found in Ngangao and most of the other high altitude forests.

Most of the lower altitude forests of the Taita Hills have long been cleared, but the forests at Sagalla, Ronge and Mwabira retain some birds typical of the coastal forests and the foothills of the Eastern Arc of Tanzania. These include Yellow-bellied Greenbul, Eastern Nicator, Red-capped Robin-Chat, Ashy Flycatcher, Black-headed Apalis, Blue-mantled Crested Flycatcher and Peter's Twinspot. The little-known Grey-olive Greenbul of the foothills of the northern Tanzania and central Kenya highlands is also common at these three sites.

Along with the above, a number of widespread forest species are found throughout the Taita Hills. Examples are African Goshawk, Great Sparrowhawk, African Crowned Eagle, Crested Guineafowl, Tambourine Dove, African Wood Owl, Silvery-cheeked Hornbill, Black-backed Puffback, Collared and Olive Sunbirds and Green-backed Twinspot. Black-throated Wattle-eyes are common

Abott's Starling — *Roger Barnes*

on Sagalla but apparently absent elsewhere in the Taita Hills. Rufous-breasted Sparrowhawk, Scarce Swift, and Mountain Greenbul are apparently rare visitors to the area, and five species for which historical records exist from the Taitas may now be extinct here: White-eared Barbet, Moustached Green Tinkerbird, White-tailed Crested Flycatcher, Black-fronted Bush-Shrike and Four-coloured Bush-Shrike.

The non-forest birds of the Taita Hills should not be ignored. The Taita and Chyulu Hills are the only Kenyan sites for Striped Pipit, and the birds are not hard to find on the rocky outcrops of Vuria. Freckled Nightjar and Rock Cisticola apparently inhabit similar habitat, although they are not easy to find. Keep half an eye on the sky for raptors like Egyptian Vulture, Wahlberg's and Verreaux's Eagles, and Lanner Falcon; the rare Taita Falcon has even been recorded here. Other interesting species to look out for around the shambas include Spot-flanked and Brown-breasted Barbets, Zanzibar Sombre Greenbul, White-shouldered Cliff Chat, Pale and Lead-coloured Flycatchers, and White-necked Ravens. The Yellow-bellied Apalis has a rare endemic Taita Hills race.

Other wildlife

The Taita Hills, being so heavily populated, have lost most species of large mammals, although Leopards are rumoured to survive in Mbololo, and most of the forests hold Sykes' Monkeys. Mongooses, duikers and bushbabies are relatively common, and three species of small mammals have endemic Taita Hills subspecies. The Taitas also hold three endemic butterflies (including the large and beautiful blue Taita Swallowtail), an endemic caecilian (which apparently lives around wild banana trees), and an endemic back-fanged snake

(in Mbololo). At Mwabira, look out for the small treeferns (*Cyathea dregei*) along the stream valley, as this is the only Kenyan locality for the species. The spectacular endemic Taita African Violet is easily seen on rocky outcrops in Mbololo forest. Last and largest, stop and marvel at the huge camphor and fig trees in Mbololo, which give an idea of what the whole of the Taita Hills forest must once have been like.

Conclusions

Undoubtedly, the Taita Hills are a highly rewarding area for a birdwatching trip, with incredible views and beautiful forests as well as a good selection of rare birds. However, the forests have been cleared, leaving only a tiny fraction of their former extent (even in the 1960s it was possible to walk from Vuria to Ngangao in forest), and although the Forest Department is now doing a good job of protecting the remnants, the forests are still under serious pressure. When you visit the area, please let the Forest Department staff and local people know how important the remaining forest is for the special birds, animals and plants of the Taita Hills, and remember to send your records of birds to Kenya Birds, so that you contribute a bit to the future conservation of this wonderful area.

Records

compiled by Colin Jackson
PO Box 40658, Nairobi

This section exists for the rapid publication of interesting observations and for updates to the Bird Atlas of Kenya (Lewis & Pomeroy, 1989). Contributions are welcomed. If you are sending in records for Kenya Birds, please consider the following guidelines. Records for *confirmed* breeding are useful for ALL species, even the most common ones; records of *probable* breeding (nest-building, courtship etc.) are only needed for rare species or ones where there are few breeding records. See this issue for definitions of confirmed and probable breeding records. Interesting records will be published here and the others stored by the EANHS for analysis of breeding seasons, success rates, habitat requirements etc. Please try to fill in a Nest Record Card at the same time. Much more detail can be recorded on a card, and if your record can be added to the card collection then it is of permanent value. Cards can be obtained free of charge from the EANHS Nest Record Scheme Organiser (see back page). A report listing records submitted to the scheme is published periodically in the Annual Bird Report of Scopus.

For other records of Afrotropical, oceanic and Palaearctic birds, please send in any observations and notes that you think are of interest (e.g. earliest/latest dates for Palaearctic/ Intra-African migrants, unusual records for your area). Records with information other than simply a list of birds are particularly good, e.g. "male singing from bush", or "4 seen in flock

of Barn Swallows...", or "flock of 85 roosting with other terns" etc... The Editors will select records for publication according to the space available.

For all records, including breeding records, please be precise as possible about dates and location. If you have sightings from places not easily found on the map, please take the trouble to give the latitude and longitude of the site to as much precision as you can (preferably the nearest second of arc or better). This will allow us to use these as we update the Bird Atlas of Kenya by computerised bird distribution records.

Supporting details and descriptions are always welcome for unusual records and will improve the chances of publication (see Kenya Birds 4(2), p. 84 for suggestions on how to submit a record). Records of certain species are requested for inclusion in the *Scopus* Annual Bird Report (the third issue of Scopus each year). Species of interest to *Scopus* are indicated in the new *Check-list of the Birds of Kenya* (EANHS 1996) and records should be sent to Don Turner (P O Box 48019, Nairobi). For particularly unusual sightings supporting details (i.e. field notes, photographs etc.) will be needed for scrutiny by the Ornithological Sub-committee (OS-c) Rarities Panel.

Key to records

New atlas square records are indicated in brackets. All records are from 1996 unless otherwise indicated.

Codes are: **pres**, present (first record); **post pres,** present (first post-1970 record); **prob**, probably breeding; **conf,** confirmed breeding; **post conf,** confirmed breeding (first since 1970); e.g. **conf 25B** indicates that the species is confirmed as breeding (and is therefore also present) in square 25B.

Where scientific names are not stated (here and elsewhere in Kenya Birds) the English names follow the *Check-list of the Birds of Kenya* (3rd edition), EANHS, Nairobi 1996.

Overview

Perhaps the most stunning record of the past few months is the probable Orange-winged Pytilia seen at the proposed Biodiversity Park next to the Carnivore restaurant, Langata, Nairobi. This is a rare and seldom-recorded species in Kenya these days. If the record is accepted by the OS-c. Rarities Panel, it would be the first for the central highlands in at least half a century.

New atlas-square records in this issue are dominated by a few areas: the northern part of Laikipia, the Taita Hills and Taveta, south Nyanza and Kapenguria. Some species seem to have cropped up at once in several new squares, notably the Pearl-spotted Owlet, new for three squares and a new breeding record for a fourth. The final holes in one or two species' ranges are being filled in — with its presence in 49A, the Laughing Dove has been recorded from all but one square in west, central and southern Kenya. It surely *must* occur in square 60D too, but has not been reported there yet (see the map for where that is!).

There have also been some interesting sightings of birds out of season, such as the Osprey on 22 October — either an extremely early migrant or, more likely,

a non-breeding bird that stayed on in its wintering grounds. Seabirds are a group of birds only seen by the fortunate few who can get out to sea on a boat! Recent records include Wilson's Storm-petrel off the coast from Shimoni. This species, despite being one of the most numerous in the world, is very infrequently seen off our coast. Similarly, there has been an unusually large number of frigatebirds recorded during the year. Either these birds are not as uncommon as was thought, or have recently become commoner closer to the shore.

Some other Afrotropical records worthy of note include the Blue Quail found dead one morning outside Ngulia Safari Lodge in Tsavo West NP. This species is considered regionally Vulnerable there have been very few recent records. The Piapiac seen near Lake Kanyaboli is also a nice record for a species which, while common in parts of Uganda, has a very restricted in range in Kenya. One of the strangest records must however be the Yellow-crowned Bishops at Ileret — the only other northern record for this species being 120 km further south at the mouth of the Turkwell River. This presumably represents a movement related to local rainfall conditions. Also from Ileret is the first record of the Abyssinian Ground Hornbill to the east of L. Turkana, other than at Moyale. A nicely detailed list of birds by Tony Stones from Lambwe Valley in South Nyanza produced some good records too, such as Marsh Tchagra, African Penduline Tit and Common Button-quails, the last being quite some way out of the previously recorded range. The introduced Indian race of the House Sparrow now seems to be firmly established in Nairobi: not unexpected, as their spread from the coast and Tanzania has been documented over the last decade or two. This is not exactly a welcome arrival, since introduced species often out-compete local species for nest sites and food, causing their populations to decline. As a result we would welcome ALL records of this species away from Mombasa — though please make sure what you are seeing ARE House Sparrows and not Rufous Sparrows, with which they can be easily confused!

Palaearctic migrant records were fewer this year, especially falcon records. One particularly interesting record, though, is the juvenile female Eurasian Sparrowhawk that hit a window in Gatab, Mt. Kulal in September. It was picked up stunned, photographed and released once it had recovered. This is an extremely early record for a species for which there have been fewer than 20 records, previously only between November and March. Another rare migrant *Accipiter*, a Levant Sparrowhawk, was observed hanging around the escarpment by Ngulia Safari Lodge for a few days in November, the second one to be seen there in the last two years. The most fascinating, however, must be the Northern Lapwing at Sabaki River mouth in August. This is surely the same individual which was first seen there in February 1995, and regularly observed afterwards by birders who visited the site. What it was doing there in August, 18 months after it was first found and when it should normally be breeding, no-one knows.

Individuals of this species usually starts breeding at latest by their second year. Perhaps it was unable to find its way back to its natal area and has now got thoroughly confused about where it should be and when!

Lastly, there have been some interesting breeding records received since the last issue, including the well-watched (and twitched!) African Water Rail at the Splash wetlands beside Wilson Airport, Langata — the first breeding record for the species in the Nairobi area. One other unusual record was that of an Eastern Yellow-billed Hornbill nesting in a termite hill at Ileret beside the north-eastern shores of L. Turkana. This is an extraordinary record and the first of its kind to our knowledge: this species normally uses tree cavities to breed in.

Do send in any records you have, particularly any first and last dates of migrants seen, both Palaearctic and intra-African, or any unusually large or impressive movements of birds. We are keen to publish information of this kind.

Observations: Afrotropical species

Wilson's Storm-petrel: a small black petrel with white rump and square tail, probably this species, was seen off Shimoni, 12/10, PDH — a good record as this species is rarely seen off the Kenya coast, visiting from its sub-antarctic breeding grounds. *Awaiting acceptance from the Rarities Panel.*

White-tailed Tropicbird: at sea in the Pemba Channel off Shimoni, 1/9 & 6/10, SH, PDH — a generally uncommon species, most frequently recorded from this site.

Masked Booby: single bird seen Pemba Channel, 14/9, PDH

Great Cormorant: [pres 49C] Nandi Hills, 12/10, JH

African Darter: on L. Baringo, 29/9, KB, JL; L. Naivasha, 9/10, AL; 5 soaring overhead at the proposed Carnivore Biodiversity Park, Langata, Nbi, 31/10, FN, WBW — it is good to receive records of this species now considered as regionally Vulnerable.

Frigatebird sp., probably **Greater:** "masses of frigatebirds seen about 55-60 miles out to sea" off Shimoni, 16-17/3, and a single bird seen 15/9, PDH, SH — frigatebirds are recorded almost annually off the Kenyan coast but due to difficulty in identification are not narrowed down to species level. The Greater is the most likely identity for most records, however. Another frigatebird was seen flying along Tiwi Beach on 22/9 and appeared as if it would attack the toy kite that the observer was flying! A second bird was seen there mid-morning on 31/12, A&KR

Little Egret: [pres 51C] Lewa Downs Conservancy, Isiolo, 16/10, FK

Green-backed Heron: [post pres 100D] Ziwani Tented Camp, Taveta, 6/10, AA

Abdim's Stork: Lambwe Valley (including Ruma NP), S. Nyanza, TS: numbers built up over a week — 30 on 6/11 to 500+ 12/11

Hadada Ibis: [pres 51A] Samburu NP, Archer's Post, 26/10, WV, TM

Egyptian Goose: [pres 51A] Samburu NP, Archer's Post, 26/10, WV, TM

African Black Duck: Mpala Ranch, 55 km NNW of Nanyuki; 13/10, CT — unusually low altitude (1600 m) and dry habitat for this species.

African Swallow-tailed Kite: one, Tsavo East NP, 29/7, JE

White-headed Vulture: [pres 38D] "Maralal square", 10/10/95, TP

Banded Snake Eagle: Kakamega Forest, 28 & 29/9, NS — a scarce and very local species; Kakamega is one of the best places to find it.

Great Sparrowhawk: [pres 51C] Borana Ranch, Timau, 8/10, NW, MD

Lizard Buzzard: Ridgeways, Nbi, 10/7, WBW

Ayres' Hawk Eagle: one seen taking a Eurasian Roller in front of Ngulia SL, Tsavo West NP, 17/12, ND, CJ — the eagle was almost immediately pushed off its meal by a Wahlberg's Eagle who was then chased off by a pair of Augur Buzzards! This is an unusual record for this species, the bird probably originating from the population known to occur on the Chyulu Hills to the north-west.

Lanner Falcon: [pres 49A] Sergoit Rock, nr Eldoret, 13/10, CK

Peregrine Falcon: [pres 38D] "Maralal square", 9/2, TP; [pres 60C] one low along valley, Lambwe Valley, S. Nyanza, 13/9, TS

Blue Quail: one found dead in morning by lodge, Ngulia, Tsavo West NP, 4/11 GM & PG; now a rare intra-African migrant in Kenya, this is only the second record for Ngulia (the first was a bird ringed on 17/12/82)

Harlequin Quail: [pres 49A] Sergoit Rock & surroundings, nr Eldoret, 13/10, CK

Common Button Quail: [pres 60C] 2 seen separately on 13/11, Lambwe Valley, S. Nyanza, TS — a very interesting record, significantly further west than previous ones. Recent heavy rain may have attracted the birds into the area.

African Water Rail: [pres 51C] Lewa Downs Conservancy, Isiolo, 16/10, FK

Black Crake: [pres 49A] Sergoit Rock & surroundings, nr Eldoret, 13/10, CK

Allen's Gallinule: 50+ seen around islands in L. Baringo, 29/9, KB, JL

Purple Swamphen: [pres 37C] 1 on Keringet Dam, Kapenguria, 19/7, JE — some way out of the species' normal range, probably a wanderer.

Hartlaub's Bustard: [pres 51C] Lewa Downs Conservancy, Isiolo, 16/10, FK

Spur-winged Plover: [pres 51C] Lewa Downs Conservancy, Isiolo, 16/10, FK

Crowned Plover: [pres 60C] Lambwe Valley, S. Nyanza, 21/8, TS

Brown Noddy: "common" at Kisite Marine Park and at sea in Pemba Channel off Shimoni, 12/10, EM, JS & PDH

Chestnut-bellied Sandgrouse: [pres 51C] Lewa Downs Conservancy, Isiolo, 16/10, FK

African Mourning Dove: [pres 50D] Mpala Ranch, Nanyuki, 13/10, CT

Laughing Dove: [pres 49A] Sergoit Rock & surroundings, nr Eldoret, 13/10, CK; this is the penultimate Atlas square to be filled for this species in western, central & southern Kenya — amazing it has lasted so long! (The only one remaining is 60D...)

Brown Parrot: Sergoit Rock & surroundings, nr Eldoret, 13/10, CK; first time seen at this site. 1-2 birds in garden

every day, Kilimani, Nbi, 1-13/11, Cr; also at Splash Wetlands, Langata, Nbi, 23/12, ND — this western species is now seen from time to time around Nbi: presumably escaped birds.

Hartlaub's Turaco: 14 together in a fig-tree is an usually high number for this regionally endemic species, Karen, Nbi, 6/10, I & GvS (...the figs must have been really tasty...)

Black-&-white Cuckoo: at proposed Carnivore Biodiversity Park, Langata, Nbi, 17/11, FN

Great Spotted Cuckoo: 2 at L. Baringo, 15/7, JE — considering the date, these are probably "local" breeding birds, rather than Palaearctic migrants.

African Emerald Cuckoo: [pres 60D] N. Mathioya River Camp, Muranga Dist., 11/10, PP

Yellowbill: 1 found in City Park, Nbi, 15/9, FN

Black Coucal: a juvenile was seen flying across a field, Kakamega, 24/8, ND — a nice record of a skulking and local species that is not seen very often.

Barn Owl: [pres 49A] Sergoit Rock & surroundings, nr Eldoret, 13/10, CK; Limuru Rd, Kiambaa, Kiambu, 12/10, AC-B — not an uncommon species but often overlooked.

Pearl-spotted Owlet: [pres 38D] "Maralal square", 9/2, TP; [pres 51C] Lewa Downs Conservancy, Isiolo, 16/10, FK; [pres 51A] Samburu NP, Archer's Post, 26/10, WV, TM

Nubian Nightjar: 4 ringed at Ngulia SL, Tsavo West NP, in Nov/Dec, NRG — the first for some years.

African Black Swift: Ngulia SL, Tsavo West NP, 13/12, NRG, normally a highland species, this bird was probably from the small population on the Taita Hills.

Half-collared Kingfisher: recorded at the weir on the Mkurumingi River, Shimba Hills NR, 12/10, FA

African Pygmy Kingfisher: [pres 100D] Ziwani Tented Camp, Taveta, 6/10, AA; 1 ringed 15/10 and retrapped 26/10, NMK, Nbi, NbiRG — this is the third individual of this species to be ringed at NMK.

Giant Kingfisher: [pres 100D] Ziwani Tented Camp, Taveta, 6/10, AA

Violet Wood-hoopoe: observed at Ziwani Tented Camp, Taveta, 6/10, by AA, and around L. Jipe on 21/8 by WV & TM; a local and uncommon species that is not often reported. It is possibly resident but more records are needed to confirm this.

Common Scimitarbill: [pres 61A] Homa Lime, Koru, January, NW

Abyssinian Ground Hornbill: [pres 4C] Ileret, June, EJN (photo supplied) — this species has rarely been recorded to the east of L. Turkana in Kenya.

African Grey Hornbill: [pres 51C] Lewa Downs Conservancy, Isiolo, 16/10, FK

Hairy-breasted Barbet: Kakamega Forest, 29/9, NS — a rare resident of Kakamega Forest, the only place in Kenya it has been recorded.

Brown-breasted Barbet: [pres 100D] Ziwani Tented Camp, Taveta, 6/10, AA

Red-&-yellow Barbet: [pres 51C] Borana Ranch, Timau, 8/10, NW, MD

Greater Honeyguide: [pres 38D] "Maralal square", 9/2, TP; [pres 49A] Sergoit Rock & surroundings, nr Eldoret, 13/10, CK

Grey-rumped Swallow: 2 in a mixed flock of swallows, Kenyatta University Sewage Treatment Ponds, Nbi, 2/10, WBC (FN)

Rufous-chested Swallow: Musiara Swamp, Masai Mara, 2/10, WO, EN, SN — an uncommon species:, the Mara is

one of the better-known areas where it occurs.

White-headed Saw-wing: flock of 50+ seen, Lambwe Valley, S. Nyanza, 11/9, TS — an exceptionally large flock for this species, the largest previously reported being one of c. 40 birds in Zaïre (*Birds of Africa,* vol. 4)

Grassland Pipit: [pres 100D] Ziwani Tented Camp, Taveta, 6/10, AA; this species was formerly considered conspecific with Richard's Pipit from which it was recently split.

Long-billed Pipit: [pres 51C] Lewa Downs Conservancy, Isiolo, 16/10, FK

Rosy-breasted Longclaw: Musiara Swamp, Masai Mara, 2/10, WO, EN, SN

Northern Brownbul: [pres 51C] Lewa Downs Conservancy, Isiolo, 16/10, FK; [pres 51A] Samburu NP, Archer's Post, 26/10, WV, TM

Grey-chested Illadopsis: a single bird seen feeding on a path just after rain with 2 Equatorial Akalats and a Red-tailed Bristlebill, Kakamega forest, 21/7, JE — this little-known and very restricted species is not often sighted.

Little Rock Thrush: Kijabe, Rift Valley escarpment, 8/10, CD

African Thrush: [pres 49A] Sergoit Rock & surroundings, nr Eldoret, 13/10, CK

Lead-coloured Flycatcher: this infrequently recorded species was seen during the World Bird Count on 9/10 in the Arabuko-Sokoke Forest near Gede Forest Station, DN, ET, TaB

Whistling Cisticola: seen on 2 separate occasions near Rondo in Kakamega forest, 21/7 by JE and 24/8 by ND, MiP & MS

Grey Wren-Warbler: [pres 38D] "Maralal square", 9/2, TP

Banded Parisoma: [pres 100D] Ziwani Tented Camp, Taveta, 6/10, AA

Yellow-bellied Hyliota: Olololo Escarpment, Masai Mara, 4/10, WO, EN, SN — an infrequently reported species, at its southern limit in Kenya at this site.

Southern Hyliota: Kakamega forest, 28/9, NS — a rare resident of this and the Nandi forests, keeping mostly to the tree-tops.

African Penduline Tit: a flock of at least 7 birds feeding in a seeding tree, Olando, Lambwe Valley, S.Nyanza, 11/9, TS — an interesting western record of this less common species, in this case presumably of the race *sharpei*; 2 at Kenyatta University Sewage Treatment Ponds, nr Nbi, 2/10, FN

African Paradise Flycatcher: [pres 100D] Ziwani Tented Camp, Taveta, 6/10, AA

Black-throated Wattle-eye: [pres 49A] Keringet Dam, Kapenguria, 19/7, JE

White-crested Helmet-shrike: [pres 17C] Funanyata, nr Moyale, 23/4/95, CJ

Marsh Tchagra: 2 in Ruma NP, Lambwe Valley, S. Nyanza, 12/11, TS — another infrequently reported species.

Doherty's Bush-Shrike: Derby House, Kericho 5/10, KB; Molo, 13/10, G&DI — an uncommon and local species that is not often reported.

Tropical Boubou: [pres 100D] Ziwani Tented Camp, Taveta,6/10, AA

Sulphur-breasted Bush-Shrike: [pres 100D] Ziwani Tented Camp, Taveta, 6/10, AA

Black-headed Oriole: [pres 100D] Ziwani Tented Camp, Taveta, 6/10, AA

Piapiac: near L.Kanyaboli, Siaya, 24/8, ND, MiP, & MS — a scarce and local species in Kenya, records possibly referring to wanderers from Uganda

where it is more numerous and widespread.

Abbott's Starling: a male and a female seen together, Kieni Forest (30 km NW of Nbi), 5/10, TB, TP & FN

Magpie Starling: L. Baringo, 29/9, MR and 10/10, MO; also Ndololo Camp, Tsavo East NP, 21/11, SFS — classic dates for these areas, thought to be birds involved in a post-breeding dispersal movement from the north. Tsavo East is at the southern boundary of their usual range.

Western Violet-backed Sunbird: 1 seen in garden of Sirikwa Guest House, Kapenguria, 19/7, JE

Marico Sunbird: [pres 49A] Sergoit Rock & surroundings, nr Eldoret, 13/10, CK

House Sparrow: there has now been a smattering of records of this introduced species from around Nairobi: Splash Wetlands, Langata, 24/11, FN, TP, TB

Yellow-spotted Petronia: Kingfisher picnic site, Nbi NP, 26/12, ND

White-browed Sparrow-Weaver: [pres 60C] Ruma NP, Lambwe Valley, S. Nyanza, TS: only around the Nyadende Gate, 1 on 12/9 and 3 on 15/11.

Clarke's Weaver: flocks reported of 3-400 birds from Arabuko-Sokoke Forest, 30/7-1/8, JE — these are unusually large numbers of this species in a single flock.

Brown-capped Weaver: [pres 76A] Ol Donyo Sabuk NP, 22/9, FN; this species is known from other 'forest islands' such as Marsabit, but has previously been overlooked at this site.

Red-headed Weaver: female foraging in top of a *Croton* tree in a fixed bird party, Arboretum, Nbi, 18/8, FN

Yellow-crowned Bishop: [pres 4C] a flock of over 110 birds by the lake, Ileret, L. Turkana, June, EJN (photo supplied) — an extremely interesting observation, being c. 120 km further north than the only other northern record (Turkwell delta); this for a very local and uncommon bird of swampy and moist grassland found mainly in the western and central highlands. It is described as being a wanderer with movements at least partly stimulated by rainfall, as are several of the bishops.

Hartlaub's Marsh Widowbird: 2 seen near Keringet Dam, Kapenguria, 19/7, JE

Orange-winged Pytilia: a male and female pytilia with orange edges to their wings were seen together at the proposed Carnivore Biodiversity Park, Langata, Nbi on 17/11, by FN and WBW — *yet to be accepted by O-Sc Rarities Panel.* If accepted, this will be the first record of this rare species in the central highlands for 50-75 years

Yellow-bellied Waxbill: recorded for first time in Langata and regularly since, Nov., GB

Crimson-rumped Waxbill: [pres 26B] Gatab, Mt Kulal, MB

Zebra Waxbill: 3 seen in wheat stubble at Sergoit Rock, nr Eldoret, 12/10, CK; a local and usually uncommon species recorded here on the edge of its western range in Kenya.

Village Indigobird: : [pres 49A] Sergoit Rock & surroundings, nr Eldoret, 13/10, CK

Steel-blue Whydah: Homa Lime, Koru, April-June, NW — a local and generally uncommon species recorded here at the eastern edge of its range in the L. Victoria basin

Golden-breasted Bunting: [pres 49C] Nandi Hills, 12/10, JH

Somali Golden-breasted Bunting: [pres 51C] Lewa Downs Conservancy, Isiolo, 16/10, FK

Bird Atlas of Kenya — Quarter Square Degree numbers

A number of *Kenya Birds* readers will already be familiar with the Bird Atlas of Kenya (Lewis and Pomeroy, 1989), being fortunate enough to either own or at least have reference to a copy. In the records section of each issue of *Kenya Birds*, reference is made to "new atlas records" and are followed by a number in parentheses such as: [pres 64C]. Those who are not familiar with the Atlas may have wondered what these mean and also what should be filled in on the National Bird Map checklists and Nest Record Cards where a box is given labelled as "Atlas square".

The Bird Atlas of Kenya, written by Adrian Lewis and Derek Pomeroy and published in 1989 is a book that both maps and describes in some detail the known distribution of every species of bird that had been recorded in Kenya up until 1984. The map of Kenya was divided into squares and for every species, if it had been seen in a given square, it was marked with a symbol indicating as to whether it was present, was probably breeding or confirmed breeding. The squares thus form the basis for the Atlas distributions, and the numbers in the records section as mentioned above, therefore refer to the number of the atlas square in which the record was made.

In view of so few people having access to an Atlas, we thought it would be useful to publish in *Kenya Birds* a map of Kenya showing the Atlas squares along with the major towns. This is to assist observers in knowing which square they are in when completing any checklists or nest record cards they wish to submit to the Ornithology Dept. Each square has two parts to it — a number and letter (e.g. "64C"). The number, in this case "64", refers to the degree square that you are in and the letter, "C", to the particular quarter of the degree square. The sequence of the letters (a, b, c and d) is shown in square number 2 of the

Bird Atlas of Kenya — Quarter Square Degree numbers

A number of *Kenya Birds* readers will already be familiar with the Bird Atlas of Kenya (Lewis and Pomeroy, 1989), being fortunate enough to either own or at least have reference to a copy. In the records section of each issue of *Kenya Birds*, reference is made to "new atlas records" and are followed by a number in parentheses such as: [pres 64C]. Those who are not familiar with the Atlas may have wondered what these mean and also what should be filled in on the National Bird Map checklists and Nest Record Cards where a box is given labelled as "Atlas square".

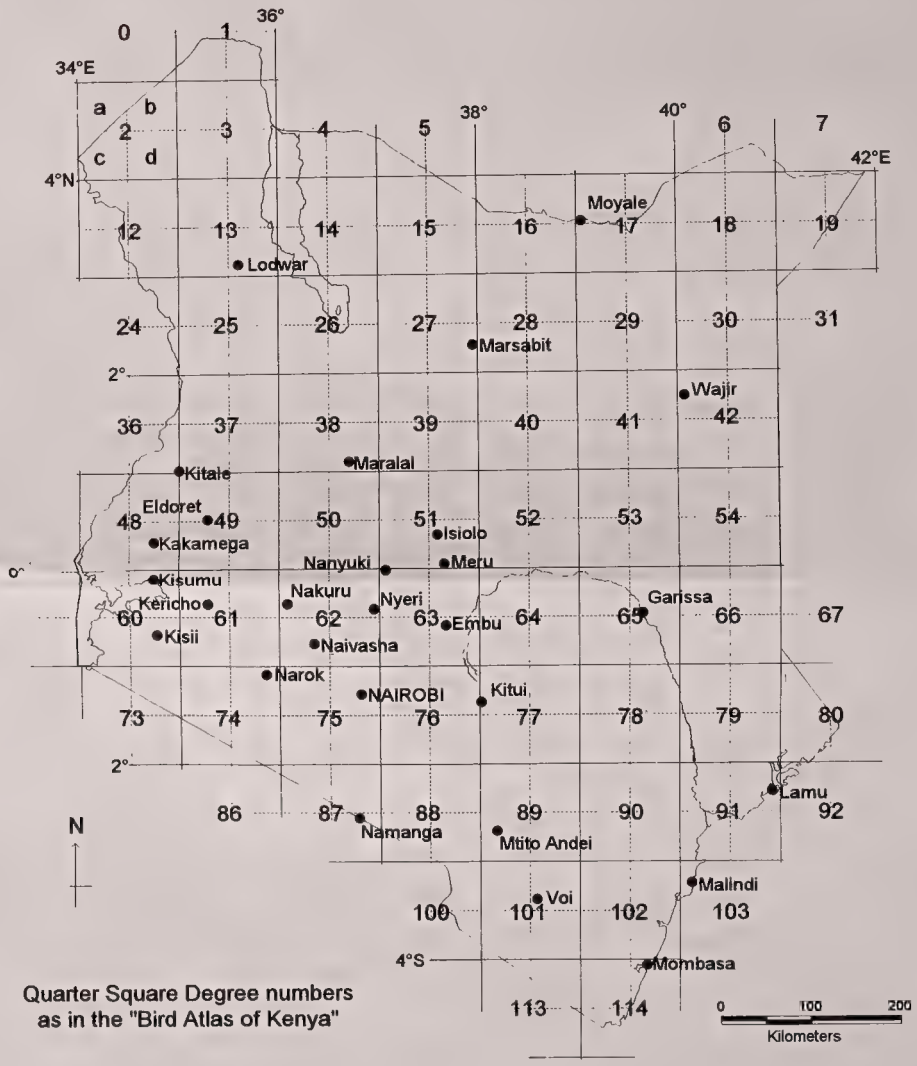
The Bird Atlas of Kenya, written by Adrian Lewis and Derek Pomeroy and published in 1989 is a book that both maps and describes in some detail the known distribution of every species of bird that had been recorded in Kenya up until 1984. The map of Kenya was divided into squares and for every species, if it had been seen in a given square, it was marked with a symbol indicating as to whether it was present, was probably breeding or confirmed breeding. The squares thus form the basis for the Atlas distributions, and the numbers in the records section as mentioned above, therefore refer to the number of the atlas square in which the record was made.

In view of so few people having access to an Atlas, we thought it would be useful to publish in *Kenya Birds* a map of Kenya showing the Atlas squares along with the major towns. This is to assist observers in knowing which square they are in when completing any checklists or nest record cards they wish to submit to the Ornithology Dept. Each square has two parts to it — a number and letter (e.g. "64C"). The number, in this case "64", refers to the degree square that you are in and the letter, "C", to the particular quarter of the degree square. The sequence of the letters (a, b, c and d) is shown in square number 2 of the map overleaf. For example therefore, Mtito Andei is in square 89C, Kisumu in 60B and Malindi 103A. Kitale is shown as being on an intersection and is in fact mostly in 37C. The map overleaf doesn't show much detail due to the lack of space on a small map. You can tell more accurately which square you are birding in by using a commercially available road map (that shows the main lines of longitude and latitude) and drawing your own extra lines at half-degree intervals to make the quarter degree squares.

Despite the intensive amount of fieldwork carried out over a number of years to produce the map and the amount of birding done since it was published, there are still many new records being submitted each year. If you are able to visit more remote areas of the country, you are almost bound to see something new! Do let us have your records so we can publish all the new ones in Kenya Birds. An update of all new records from when the Atlas was carried out (1884) to October 1994 is available in the Ornithology Department at a minimal cost.

intersection and is in fact mostly in 37C. The map overleaf doesn't show much detail due to the lack of space on a small map. You can tell more accurately which square you are birding in by using a commercially available road map (that shows the main lines of longitude and latitude) and drawing your own extra lines at half-degree intervals to make the quarter degree squares.

Despite the intensive amount of fieldwork carried out over a number of years to produce the map and the amount of birding done since it was published, there are still many new records being submitted each year. If you are able to visit more remote areas of the country, you are almost bound to see something new! Do let us have your records so we can publish all the new ones in Kenya Birds. An update of all new records from when the Atlas was carried out (1884) to October 1994 is available in the Ornithology Department at a minimal cost.



Quarter Square Degree numbers
as in the "Bird Atlas of Kenya"

Observations: Palaearctic species

White Stork: 200+ moving south, Maseno School, 24/2 and a further 200+ low over trees heading north-east, 3/3, JA; 350+ over Nandi Hills town, 18/3, KK; few dozen moving north along with Common Buzzards, Moi University Chepkoilel Campus, Eldoret, 18/3, LL, PN, CJ, EW, JO, TB

Black Stork: 1 at proposed Carnivore Biodiversity Park, Langata, Nbi, 21/10, and another on 17/11, FN

Garganey: L. Naivasha Country Club, L. Naivasha, 25/10, CR; one of the first records for the year.

Osprey: Lambwe Valley, S. Nyanza, 22/8, TS — with a date like this, probably a non-breeder that stayed on during the northern summer; 2 immatures migrating south away from the lake, western end of L. Naivasha, 21/9, CJ — an early record for this species; 1 seen over Thika Falls, 10/10, WBC (FN's group); a less common record away from the usual locations of the main lakes or coast.

Pallid Harrier: Musiara Swamp, Masai Mara, 2/10, WO, EN, SN — an early record.

Montagu's Harrier: Musiara Swamp, Masai Mara, 2/10, WO, EN, SN — an early record.

Eurasian Marsh Harrier: Musiara Swamp, Masai Mara, 2/10, WO, EN, SN — an early record.

Levant Sparrowhawk: Ngulia SL, Tsavo West NP, 11-16/11, NRG; another bird, probably this species and awaiting acceptance by the Rarities Panel, was seen at Ndara Ranch, Voi on 26/11, MR

Lesser Spotted Eagle: Ngulia SL, Tsavo West NP, 1 on 14 /11 and a second, apparently unwell, on 12/12, NRG

Steppe Eagle: Ngulia SL, Tsavo West NP, 16/11, NRG: a visible movement of eagles with over 50 birds moving south over the lodge along the Ngulia ridge between 8:30 am and mid-day.

Booted Eagle: Mara River Camp, 3/10, WO, EN, SN — an early record; 1 at Ngong Race Course, Nbi, 18/12, WBW

Amur Falcon: Ndololo Camp, Tsavo East NP, 21/11, SFS

Corncrake: 2-3 seen, Ngulia SL, Tsavo West NP, around 16/12, NRG

Little Ringed Plover: [pres 51C] Lewa Downs Conservancy, Isiolo, 16/10, FK

Northern Lapwing: 1 present at Sabaki River Mouth, 1/8, JE — this is probably the same individual that was first seen here in Feb. 1995; it was the first record for East Africa and clearly lost (!). Considering the date of this record, it is likely that it has been unable to return to its breeding grounds and has spent its time moving up and down the east African coast.

Little Stint: [pres 51C] Lewa Downs Conservancy, Isiolo, 16/10, FK

Ruff: [pres 51C] Lewa Downs Conservancy, Isiolo, 16/10, FK

Bar-tailed Godwit: a single bird at Mida Creek on 1/8, JE, probably an over-summering individual.

Green Sandpiper: at proposed Biodiversity Park, Langata, Nbi, 18/9, FN

Eurasian Swift: [pres 38D] "Maralal square", 10/10/95, TP

Eurasian Scops Owl: 3 ringed at Ngulia SL, Tsavo West NP, on 6, 8 & 11/12, NRG

Eurasian Bee-eater: [pres 38D] "Maralal square", 14/10/93, TP

Hoopoe (Palaearctic race *Upupa e. epops*)**:** Ngulia SL, Tsavo West NP, 27/9, DP

Common House Martin: [pres 60C] at least one over Ruma NP, S. Nyanza, 12/11, TS

Grey Wagtail: Ngulia SL, Tsavo West NP, 25/9, DP; 1 in Arboretum, Nbi, 16/10, FN, WBW

Sprosser: 1 ringed NMK, Nbi, 26/10 with a further 6 on 31/10 and 28 in Langata, Nbi on 2/11, NbiRG; also several observed at Carnivore Biodiversity Park, Langata around the same time by a number of observers. Unusually abundant around Nbi (in two-and-a-half years ringing at NMK, only one other Sprosser had been ringed).

Irania: female at proposed Biodiversity Park, Langata, Nbi, 30/10, FN — an unusual species for Nbi

Whinchat: : [pres 49A] 2 birds seen in wheat stubble at Sergoit Rock, nr Eldoret, 13/10, CK; a male on 9/11 and several later during Nov., Lambwe Valley, S. Nyanza, TS; 1 at Muhoroni, 10/11, CJ; 1 at Ngulia SL, Tsavo West NP, 13-14/12, NRG — a scarce species at Ngulia.

Northern Wheatear: a male at proposed Biodiversity Park, Langata, Nbi, 18/9, WBW

Isabelline Wheatear: an early record at Gitiligini, Mai Mahiu, headwaters Little Kedong River, 2/10, P&MF; also recorded in Masai Mara on the same date, WO, EN, SN

Common Rock Thrush: 1 at proposed Carnivore Biodiversity Park, Langata, Nbi, 21/10, FN — one of the first records for the year.

Sedge Warbler: L. Naivasha Country Club, L. Naivasha, 25/10, CR — an early record for a species which is also more commonly seen during its northward m gration.

Olivaceous Warbler: more than one, Ridgeways Estate, Nbi, 13/11, FN; 2 in garden, Kiambere Rd, Upper Hill, Nbi, 11/12, FN

Upcher's Warbler: one bathing at Hippo Pools, Nbi National Park, 28/12, CJ

Common Whitethroat: [pres 61A] Homa Lime, Koru, January, NW

Eurasian Golden Oriole: Loresho Ridge, Nbi, 6/10, CS, TI; a relatively early record

Breeding records

Many thanks go to all those who have sent in Nest Record Cards over the past six months or so. A total of 181 records have been submitted of which 144 were confirmed and 37 probable breeding records. These cover 105 species and were submitted by 33 contributors. Those people who sent in breeding records are listed below, with the number of records submitted — all those who sent in more than 10 deserve special congratulations, particularly Jeffory Coburn who submitted an amazing 81 records including nests of hard-to-find species such as Slender-tailed Nightjar and Heuglin's Courser.

Cards submitted:

Jeffory Coburn	81
Tony Stones	20
David Mutinda	16
Neil Willsher	14

Peter Maina	13
Sybil Sassoon	8
Kuria Ndung'u	9
James Wainaina	6
Dorrie Brass	4
Maia Hemphill	4
Charles Rugara	4
Kimbo Beakbane	3
Korir Kimtai	3
Bernard Mburu	3
Onesmas Kahindi	2
Beatrice Kamami	2
Kevin Mulai	2
Joesph Oyugi	2
Sailesh Patel	2
Marlene Reid	2

Single cards were submitted by: Reuben Chege, Andrew Cheruiyot, Pat Frere, L. Grumbley, Philip Hechle, F. Kagema, Susan Kamami, Carol Kruger, Paul Lascelles, Francian Muthoni, Reuben Nagaya, George Oyuga and Dave Richards.

Blank Nest Record Cards are available upon request (see above).

Records of interest

Somali Ostrich: 8 eggs in a nest, Samburu Game Reserve, 1/9, JC — all the eggs disappeared overnight; ostrich nests are robbed even in "protected" areas...

Little Bittern: a pair nest-building, L. Baringo, 24/8, JC; nest with 3 eggs, Elsamere, L. Naivasha, 9/10, RC

Common Squacco Heron: nest with 4 eggs, L. Baringo, 24/8, JC

Hooded Vulture: [conf 51A] 2 nests with incubating adult, Samburu Game Reserve, 2/9, JC

Lappet-faced Vulture: [conf 51A] nest with incubating adult, Samburu Game Reserve, 1/9, JC

African Harrier Hawk: [conf 61A] adult incubating, Homa Lime Co. Koru, nr Kisumu, 16/4, NW

Eastern Pale Chanting Goshawk: 1 young in nest, L. Baringo, 24/4, JC

Great Sparrowhawk: [post conf 37C] young seen in nest, Saiwa Swamp NP, nr Kitale, 9/10, PL

African Crowned Eagle: juvenile near nest, Kakamega forest, 21/7, JE

Grey Kestrel: [prob 60A] a pair observed courting and later copulating, ICIPE Research Centre, Mbita, L. Victoria, 25/8, TS; this species is usually thought to copulate inside its nest, rather than outside as here

Stone Partridge: [conf 50B] 5 adults with 2 young unable to fly seen daily, Ol Malo Ranch, Laikipia, 4-12/9, SS

Helmeted Guineafowl: [conf 61A] 3 adults with 4 young observed, Homa Lime, Koru, nr Kisumu, 23/5, NW; nest with 12 eggs, L. Baringo, 25/8, JC — eggs all disappeared overnight

African Water Rail: [conf 75B] 2 downy chicks following adults swimming, Splash Wetland, Langata, Nbi, 9/10, DR — a skulking an unobtrusive species (like most crakes!), this is a good record and goes to show what proper treatment of waste water can do!

Allen's Gallinule: 1 nest with 4 eggs & another with 8, L. Baringo, 26/8, JC

Grey Crowned Crane: nest with 2 eggs, northern edge of lake, L. Naivasha, 5/10, JW — good to get breeding records of this regionally near-threatened species.

White-bellied Bustard: Juvenile too young to fly, Ol Malo Ranch, Laikipia, 4-12/9, SS

Black-bellied Bustard: [prob 60C] displaying birds seen Ruma NP, Lambwe Valley, S. Nyanza, 21/8 & 7/11, TS

African Jacana: nest with 4 eggs, L. Baringo, 26/8, JC

Spotted Thick-knee: 2 young near nest, Samburu Game Reserve, 2/9, JC

Black-headed Plover: nest with 3 eggs, L. Baringo, 26/8, JC

Roseate Tern: many young seen, Whale Island, off Mida Creek, Watamu, 16/9, LG — this is one of the largest breeding colonies of terns along our coastline.

Black-faced Sandgrouse: [conf 51A] juvenile being fed by adult male, Samburu Game Reserve, 2/9, JC

Namaqua Dove: 3 nests found, 1 with 2 eggs, another with 1 chick and the last with 2 chicks, L. Baringo, 26-27/8, JC

Speckled Pigeon: [conf 61A] adult on nest, Homa Lime Co., Koru, nr Kisumu, 24/5, NW

Great Blue Turaco: 2 adults building nest beside road near Rondo, Kakamega forest, 20-21/7, JE

Klaas's Cuckoo: [prob 60A] unaccompanied young calling repeatedly, ICIPE Research Centre, Mbita, L. Victoria, 19/8, TS

Spotted Eagle-Owl: nest with young that fledged sucessfully, Sulmac, Naivasha, Oct, GO

Pearl-spotted Owlet: [conf 89C] adult seen entering nest hole in tree and staying for long periods of time, Nyika Camp, Mtito Andei, 21/10, PH

African Wood Owl: recently fledged young photographed, Windsor Golf & Country Club, Kiambu, Nbi, 20/10, KN

Slender-tailed Nightjar: 4 nests of 1-2 eggs each for which "rains had broken all the eggs", 1 nest with 2 chicks about 1 week old, L. Baringo, 22-27/8, JC

Narina Trogon: juvenile male and female on Miotoni Rd, Karen, constitutes the first successful breeding record "for many years" at this site, 12/10, I & GvS

Little Bee-eater: [conf 89C] adults carrying food to nest in bank, Galdessa Camp, Tsavo East NP, 17/10, KM

Red-billed Hornbill: nest with 3 eggs, but adult killed on nest by children, L. Baringo, 27/8, JC; male feeding female through nest slit, Tsavo East Information Centre, Tsavo East NP, 28/12, OK

Eastern Yellow-billed Hornbill: [conf 4C] Ileret, June, EJN (photo supplied) — an interesting record since the nest was in a termite mound rather than a tree, the first time this has been documented

Hemprich's Hornbill: adult taking food to nest on a cliff, L. Baringo, 15/7, JE

African Grey Hornbill: adult carrying food to nest, Loldia Farm, Naivasha, 5/10, JW

D'Arnaud's Barbet: [conf 50B] 3 nest holes with young heard inside,Ol Malo Ranch, Laikipia, 4-12/9, SS

Greater Honeyguide: juvenile fed by a Hoopoe, 20/1, CR — the Hoopoe is one of the commonest hosts for this species.

Wire-tailed Swallow: adult carrying food to nest, Loldia Farm, Naivasha, 10/7, PM; juvenile being fed by adult, Windsor Golf & Country Club, Kiambu, Nbi, 16/10, KN

African Pied Wagtail: [post conf 60A] adult feeding young, ICIPE Research Centre, Mbita, L. Victoria, 24/8, TS

Yellow-whiskered Greenbul: nest with 2 young, Kakamega forest, 30/8, JOO — a species for which nests are not often found.

Common Bulbul: [conf 74C] nest with 3 young, Keekorok Lodge, Masai Mara NR, 18/11, OK

Black-lored Babbler: [prob 60C] bird carrying nest material, Nyaboro thicket, Lambwe Valley, 12/9, TS

Rufous Chatterer: nest with 3 young, L.Baringo, 25/8, JC

White-browed Robin-Chat: [prob 60A] juvenile accompanying adult, ICIPE Research Centre, Mbita, L. Victoria, 18/8, TS

White-browed Scrub Robin: 3 nests, 2 with 3 eggs, 1 with 1 chick, L. Baringo, 26/8, JC

African Thrush: [conf 61A] adults feeding young in nest, Homa Lime Co., Koru, nr Kisumu, 20/4, NW

African Grey Flycatcher: nest with 2 eggs, L. Baringo, 26/8, JC

Red-faced Crombec: [conf 61A] single chick being fed by adult, Homa Lime Co., Koru, nr Kisumu, 10/12, NW

Yellow-bellied Eremomela: Nest with 2 eggs, Olorgesailie, May, ND; nest with 2 eggs, L. Baringo, 25/8, JC

Chin-spot Batis: female on nest fed by male; deserted next day — when blown by the wind, a thin branch was hitting the female's head... Gitingini Farm, Maimahiu, Rift Valley below Kijabe, 2/10, PF

Common Fiscal: [conf 60C] recently fledged young begging food from adult, Kitogo Village, Lambwe Valley, S. Nyanza, 20/8, TS

Brubru: nest with 2 young, L. Baringo, 25/8, JC

Purple-throated Cuckoo-shrike: [conf 49C] nest watched with 2 chicks that fledged successfully in a private garden, Nandi Hills, April/May, PS

Montane Oriole: 3 juveniles being fed by adults, Derby House, Kericho, 17/4, KB

Eastern Violet-backed Sunbird: juvenile bird in nest fed by adult female, Campi ya Samaki, L.Baringo, 5/11, MR

Spectacled Weaver: [prob 61A] adult building nest, Homa Lime, Koru, nr Kisumu, 21/4, NW

Black-billed Weaver: adult entering nest hole and remaining inside for long period, Samoei School, Nandi Hills, 10/10, KK

Lesser Masked Weaver: [prob 60C] adult building nest, Nyaboro thicket, Lambwe Valley, 9/11, TS

Bronze Mannikin: [post prob 61A] adult building nest, Homa Lime, Koru, nr Kisumu, 20/4, NW

Yellow-fronted Canary: [prob 114C] 2 young birds accompanying adult, Shimoni, Kwale Dist., 8/2, MH

Notes

Probable versus confirmed breeding records... What's the difference?

We still know remarkably little about the status and seasonality of many bird species in Kenya, particularly the pattern and timing of breeding. We have a general idea of the distribution in most cases, but there are lots of mysteries and gaps — witness the fact that so many new Atlas records are still being added! Even for a species like the Common Bulbul, first breeding records are only now being filled in for some squares.

Over the past two years the Department of Ornithology has been working on 'National Birdmap' — a project to build up a biogeographic database of the distribution and seasonality of birds in Kenya, using all the records that are available. Developing the database has taken time, but it is now running smoothly and we are keen to receive as many records as possible of birds from around Kenya. For this we rely on people like yourself — keen birders, who spend time out in the field birding, very often in areas that the Department is never likely to get to.

Using World Birdwatch as a focus, we designed a checklist for recording field observations. Data collected using this National Birdmap form are especially useful for mapping species distributions and seasonality, including breeding. The purpose of this short article is to clarify the difference between a **probable** and a **confirmed** breeding record on the form.

In the 'status' column, we ask observers to record '1' for probable or a '2' for confirmed breeding records. However, it has become clear that we usually need some extra information to decide whether the record is really probable or confirmed — we cannot be sure that everyone is using the same criteria! Our standard guidelines are those set out in the Bird Atlas of Kenya by Adrian Lewis and Derek Pomeroy (and based on categories used in Europe). They are quite straightforward, but worth looking at carefully. Here they are, with their two-letter codes:

Probable breeding

PA. Pair observed in suitable habitat in breeding season. Evidence of a permanent territory (e.g. song) on at least two occasions, a week or more apart, at the same place.

PB. Brood patch seen on a bird in the hand.

PC. Courtship and display, by non-migratory species
PD. Visiting probable nest site
PE. Nest building activities, including hole excavation
PF. Agitated reaction of adult to observer
PG. Egg in oviduct (for a bird in the hand or museum specimen)

Confirmed breeding

CA. Nest with young
CB. Used nest or egg shells found
CC. Recently ßedged young of nidicolous species (those that stay in the nest until they are fully feathered), or downy young of nidifugous species (those that leave the nest after hatching)
CD. Distraction display or injury feigning
CE. Nest with eggs
CF. Adult carrying food for young
CG. Adult carrying faecal sac
CH. Adult entering or leaving nest hole (or similar site) in circumstances indicative of an occupied nest (but note that many barbets and woodpeckers roost in tree holes as well as nesting there, and frequently visit potential holes — so careful observations are needed)
CI. Adult incubating
CJ. Adult feeding young or juvenile birds (only for non-migratory species)

Attempts at breeding that are **known** to have failed before egg-laying are not included in either category.

If, therefore, you see a bird nesting or showing any indication of breeding, please use these guidelines to decide whether it is a probable or confirmed breeding record. Even better, add the appropriate code in the status column to indicate what category it falls into. For example, if you see a Black Kite carrying nest material but are unable to check at a later date to see if it has laid eggs, you could record it as 'PE' or '1'.

And where you have a confirmed breeding record — it's EVEN better if you can fill in a nest record card! It takes a little time and effort, but it is a big, big help. — *Colin Jackson, Ornithology, P O Box 40658, Nairobi.*

The last record of the Lammergeier in Hell's Gate?

On 30 July 1987 I was driving through Hell's Gate from Fischer's Tower towards the gorge I stopped on the main track at a point approximately level with central tower. From here I could see a large bird of prey circling above the cliffs to my left (looking back towards the park entrance) with long straight wings and prominent tail, at about 1.5 times the height of the cliff. The bird continued to soar in broad arcs for quite some time — between 10 and 15 minutes — on occasions coming within 300 m and giving plenty of opportunity for observation. The time was twenty or thirty minutes past midday on a very hot afternoon, and on our journey, White-backed and Rüppell's vultures had been active around the cliffs and in other areas of the park. Through binoculars I could easily make out the distinctive silhouette of a Lammergeier, and with the help of a telescope I could see some plumage features. Notes and sketches were taken at the time and although they are rough, they clearly refer to this species. The bird had long straight wings, quite narrow wing tips without 'fingers' (although these were

Lammergeier in Hell's Gate— *Simon Thomsett*

discernible through the telescope when the birds flew on tighter arcs) and no clear secondary bulge on the trailing edge. The wings were held flat and were wholly dark on the underside. The head was prominent and both the head and chest were pale whilst the dark diamond-shaped tail was very prominent. The bird was big, at least as big as nearby Rüppell's Vultures which were there for comparison. Earlier in the week I had seen one adult Egyptian Vulture in the park, but the head on this bird was very small in proportion to its body, compared to the Lammergeier, and the tail too was much less prominent, being more wedge-shaped than diamond-shaped. Young Egyptian Vultures are browner and more variable in plumage than the adults, but do not show the plumage combinations of this bird: in any case the size and silhouette proportions rule that species out completely.

At the time, I did not think the record was anything worth reporting — but I have since learned that this may be one of the last documented records of the species in Hell's Gate. I would be interested to learn if there are any more recent records. — *Ian Henderson, British Trust for Ornithology, Thetford, Norfolk IP24 2PU, UK.*

Birding in northern Kenya — some new records

The habitat of much of northern Kenya, part of the so-called 'Somali-Masai biome', is generally very arid with little or no surface water. The vegetation cover ranges from very sparsely scattered grass on lava-rock desert to tough, unforgiving *Acacia* thorn-scrub. As a result, relatively few bird species occur, but most of these are well adapted to survive in the harsh environment and several are in fact restricted to this biome. However, after heavy rain, when for a short time there is a flush of fresh foliage and abundant surface water, such areas can receive an influx of other species that are not normally found there, providing some interesting and unusual records.

Towards the end of April 1995 I travelled through northern Kenya *en route* to Ethiopia, making the return journey southwards in mid-May. The route was the main road through Isiolo, Marsabit and on through the Dida Galgalla desert to Turbi, Sololo and finally the border at Moyale.

Being April, the journey coincided with the long rains which, that year, were very good. As a result the vegetation was lush and green and there were rainwater pools in almost every hollow and gravel pit beside the road. Large numbers of birds were exploiting the rare abundance of food brought about by the rain — including a number of waterbirds on the rain pools. A number of the species seen were new records for the relevant Atlas squares, and others are uncommon in this normally extremely hot and arid environment.

My observations were limited, on the northward trip, to what could be identified from the top of a moving lorry(!) with one or two stops north of Marsabit whilst waiting for slower vehicles to catch up with the rest of the convoy. (Due to security problems in the area, all vehicles and particularly lorries, must travel in convoy with an armed guard.) On the southward journey, there was even less chance for birding, as I had a lift in a Land Cruiser which didn't stop at all on the way. So the list that follows of unusual birds, and new Atlas records, is probably far from exhaustive.

Birds of interest seen:

Isiolo — Marsabit
21.4.95
Magpie Starling: a northern breeding species, that moves south in the non-breeding season (see *Records*).
Black-capped Social Weaver: carrying nesting material, just north of Sereolupi.
Somali Bee-eater: a species of dry bushed habitats below 1000 m, it is common in the north and east of Kenya.
Marsabit town
22/4/95
Eurasian Hobby: a single bird over the town centre.
Dida Galgallu desert (QSD 28A)
22/4/95
Collared Pratincole: [pres 28A] 2 birds flying south, at the edge of the desert.
Magpie Starling: [pres 28A].
6/5/95
Greater Kestrel: a pair seen on a stunted tree by the road in the middle of the desert.
Collared Pratincole: two single birds seen at different points along the road.
Wood Sandpiper: [pres 28A] 5 birds on a rainwater pool in the desert.
Golden Pipit: [pres 16C & 28A] many seen along the road through the desert. I did not see this species on the north-bound journey in April — either it was absent, or in such small numbers as not to be noticed from a moving vehicle.
Turbi, Ngaso Plain (3°20'N, 38°23'E; QSD 16C)
22/4/95
Black-headed Heron: [pres 16C] 4 birds by a pool not far from edge of road.
Sacred Ibis: [pres 16C] 47 birds beside a waterhole.
Egyptian Vulture: [pres 16C] circling over Turbi centre
Black-winged Stilt: 2 birds on a rainwater pool just before Turbi.
Wood Sandpiper: [pres 16C] good numbers on rainwater pools both in Dida Galgallu desert and around Turbi.

Common Sandpiper: [pres 16C] many on rainwater pools — almost every pool had one or two birds on it.

Crested Bustard: [pres 16C] a single bird beside the road.

Laughing Dove: [pres 16C] around Turbi centre.

Red-backed Shrike: [pres 16C] a single bird perched on an *Acacia* bush to the north of Turbi.

Lesser Grey Shrike: [pres 16C] 2-3 birds seen perched on bushes to the north of Turbi — this record is well out of the normal range for this species.

White-crowned Starling: several individuals of this chunky starling — one of the northern 'specialities' — were seen around Turbi centre .

Magpie Starling: [pres 16C] this is not an uncommon species in the north, so it is surprising that it had not previously been recorded in either this square or 28A (see above).

6/5/95

African Spoonbill: [pres 16C] a single bird on a rainwater pool.

Egyptian Vulture: again seen in flight near Turbi.

Fire-fronted Bishop: [pres 16C] many birds in flocks of 10-20 — this distinctive and delightful small bishop is known to make extensive movements in response rainfall; this record seems to be the most northerly so far in Kenya.

Laga Walde, Sololo (3°26'N, 38°31'E; QSD 16D)

22/4/95

Yellow-billed Stork: [pres 16D] a single bird by a water-hole just before Laga Walde.

Egyptian Goose: [pres 16D] a few by the same water-hole as the stork.

Spur-winged Plover: [pres 16D] by the same water-hole.

Crowned Plover: a flock of 12 not far before Laga Walde

Funanyata, c.20k m south of Moyale (3°20'N, 39°5'E; QSD 17C)

23/4/95

White-crested Helmet-shrike: a small party seen of the race *vinaceigularis*.

Marico Sunbird: [pres 17C] this record represents an individual at southern limit of the Ethiopian population, and is in line with previous observations in this area which also coincided with the rains.

Willow Warbler: [pres 17C] it is perhaps surprising that this, one of the most widespread and numerous Palaearctic migrant warblers, had not previously been recorded in this atlas square.

Cheracha, c. 10 km south of Moyale

23/4/95

Eleonora's Falcon: [pres 17C] a single bird low over the trees by the road — this is the first record for this species in north-eastern Kenya. The migration route for this species (and several other of the migrant falcons) is still mysterious, but it may pass over this area on northward passage to its breeding

grounds. It is thought to fly at considerable altitudes whilst migrating, thus obscuring its movements, but is most frequently recorded in areas where there has been heavy recent rain: either forced down by storms, or attracted down to feed on the abundant insects.

Moyale (3°32'N, 39°03'E; QSD 17A)

23/4/95

Bruce's Green Pigeon: there were small groups of this local and uncommon savannah species, which is infrequently recorded in Kenya, in fruiting fig trees around the town.

African Orange-bellied Parrot: common around the town.

Diederik Cuckoo: [pres 17A] an intra-African migrant, whose movements are not yet fully understood, but which is most often recorded during the rainy season.

Bearded Woodpecker: a generally local and uncommon species, the female seen represents the southern limit of the Sudan-Ethiopian population.

Northern Black Flycatcher: birds seen here represent the southernmost limit of the Ethiopian highland race *schistacea*.

On the southward journey there were far fewer migrants present than when I travelled north. Then, passerines were plentiful and several waders were seen around every waterhole. On the way back I saw no shrikes at all, and waders were in smaller numbers and more scattered . Unfortunately it was difficult to carry out any systematic count from the top of a lorry or the back of a bumpy pick-up, but the change was very noticeable.

Clearly there is a lot that we do not yet know about bird distribution and seasonality in northern Kenya. Anyone who is able to visit or is passing through such areas can contribute tremendously to the little we do know. If readers are ever anywhere north of Isiolo, please do let us have all your records. You might find, as I did, that what appears to be a very common species, has hardly been recorded there before! — *Colin Jackson, P O Box 40658, Nairobi*

Barred Owlets take the plunge!

Literature relates the odyssey of the Owl who put to sea in a pea-green boat, and it is therefore possible that Edward Lear would not have been greatly surprised to find owls indulging in other aquatic pastimes. But I was!

Five metres from my house I have constructed a double bird-bath of local stone. At ground-level the lower of the two basins is designed for 'divers', the slightly higher basin is for 'bathers'. The outer branches of the forest over-hang,

affording dappled shade, convenient perches, and spring-beards. I felt impelled to build the diving pool for the Pygmy Kingfisher who annually spends a few months with me, up from his southern haunts. My first, temporary bird-bath was a karai, and I nearly had heart-attacks watching the tiny, brilliant arrow plunge momentarily into three inches of water, convinced that each dive would be his last. Nowadays, nine inches of water entices even Brown-headed King-fisher to make an occasional dive. The light 'pink' of Pygmy and the solid 'splosh' of Brown-hooded are sufficient for identification even without a sighting!

Seven metres downhill is a third pool, a little more exposed than the top baths.

Apart from the kingfishers, the bird species which frequent the baths include all 'my' pycnonotids: Common Bulbul, Yellow-bellied Greenbul, Zanzibar Sombre Greenbul, Little Greenbul and Terrestrial Brownbul; Tambourine and Emerald-spotted Wood Dove, Red-capped and White-browed Robin Chats, Peters' Twinspot and Bronze Mannikins.

In late January this year, at 6.30 a.m., a movement caught my eye at the lower, further basin, but all I was able to capture was a fleeting glimpse of what at first I took to be a small mammal crouching a the lip of the pool. Then instantly it was off — on wings. Brownish, with much white on the wings. Well, I thought of all the denizens of my forest shrubbery, and could only come up with one candidate: Barred Owlet. But an *owl* — on the ground, drinking from a bird-bath in the full light of morning?

Then on 16 February, sitting on my treetop-level balcony in the dusk, ten metres obliquely above the upper basins, I became aware that something was happening in the diving pool. The whole surface of the basin seemed to be ruffled, and heaving. I perceived a Barred Owlet ducking and fluffing his plumage, droplets flying about. He scrambled out and sat briefly on the rim, then plunged in again with gusto. The water was lower than usual, and he was obviously able to stand on the bottom. Then out and up on silent wings into the shrubbery canopy above. Within a second or two, back into the water again. After four or five repeat performances, I realised there were two of them, taking it in turns to have a splash, one being marginally larger than the other. Despite the incipient darkness, I had wonderful views of the owlets in my glasses; they would sit on the rim of the basin facing me for quite some seconds after a dip. Then they both flew up into a nearby woodland tree, perching cosily together on a horizontal branch, and commenced tidying up their plumage.

These Barred Owlets are my constant companions, trilling their attractive, mellow calls nightly from the forest and occasionally on the roof. In five years I have had only two previous fleeting glimpses before this red-letter evening. Despite the most intense searches, I have failed to locate the nest-hole, which would of course be a fairly important discovery, as I understand only one has ever been actually found in Kenya.

Well, Edward Lear apart, I find that the literature does record the habit of owls 'plunge-bathing', so my sighting may well be 'old hat' to many folk. I think its specialness was the fact that they were miniature owls, thus investing the idyll with an indefinable charm. I hope the performance will be repeated, and better still, in sufficient light for photography. — *Fiona Alexander, Sable Valley Wildlife Sanctuary, P O Box 890, Ukunda*

Manic birding moments at the 9th PAOC...

The 9th Pan-African Ornithological Congress that took place in Accra last December (see elsewhere in this issue) was indeed a week of meeting world-renowned ornithologists, talking deep ornithology-talk and hearing amongst other things about why the structure of the Blue Swallow's breast feathers makes them more water-proof than most other birds, etc. However, one can't expect to have 300-odd ornithologists gather together in one place and not have some mega-birding sessions as well! And so it was — indeed the organisers had thoughtfully arranged for mid-congress excursions for all those who wanted to get out and see a few West African birds. However, there were of course those even more manic birders who either went to Ghana before, or stayed on after, the congress so as to have enough time to ensure they got the Long-tailed Hawk on their list!

Two major hot-spots, at least, were visited by the Kenyan contingent. These were Kakum National Park and the Shahi Hills Reserve. Kakum is probably Ghana's best known Park amongst birders as it is a huge (by Kenyan standards) area of forest — real West African tropical rain forest — situated about three hours drive west of Accra... and is heaving with legendary birds such as the Long-tailed Hawk, Sandy Scops Owl, Framer's Rufous-Thrush, Blue Cuckoo-Shrike (what a stunner!), Madame Verreaux's Sunbird, Buff-throated Sunbird, and on and on... One can even see Cassin's Hawk Eagle from the Jungle Cafe at the visitor centre whilst tucking into a fine bowl of fufu and chicken in groundnut sauce!

One of the greatest things about visiting Kakum however, must be spending time on the canopy walkway. This is effectively a rope bridge slung between a few large trees with just a 30 cm-wide plank to walk on and a bit of rope netting either side to stop you falling more than 40 m to the forest floor below; you are literally *in* the canopy! For those who braved it (actually, whilst terrifyingly wobbly at times, it is very safe!), the walkway provided the chance to see at ridiculously close range species which one normally would see as a tiny black dot against the bright sky at the top of a huge tree — while cricking one's neck in the process! We had views of such things as Chestnut-capped Flycatcher and Tit

Hylia so close that you could almost touch them, Black Dwarf Hornbill sitting on the ropes of the walkway a mere 15 m away, and a Red-chested Owlet was seen by most people sitting in the canopy of the largest walkway tree, again only a matter of 9-10 m away. Blue Cuckoo-Shrike, Ussher's Dusky Flycatcher, Violet-backed Hyliota, Fernando-Po Batis, and Cassin's Honeybird were only a few of the other awesome birds seen from the walkway. In just few days, we had a list of over 120 species recorded only from the canopy walkway! This is surely something we need in Kenya — in Kakamega or Arabuko-Sokoke Forest, maybe?!

Shahi Hills Reserve, by contrast, is a tiny area of grassland and scattered trees around a small range of hills about an hour north of Accra. The reserve was created to protect the remnant population of Kob that occur there — only about 100 animals remain in the park and none at all outside it — but it also holds some good birding habitat with West African specialities such as Senegal Parrot, Violet Turaco, Vieillot's Barbet and Red-winged Pytilia. It was also crawling with Stone Partridge which, in the evenings, you could hear in all directions, and, with the hills and hot weather, it was great for raptors including migrant Eurasian Hobbies and Eurasian Marsh Harriers. One of the more stunning birds there was the Gonolek, similar to ours in western Kenya, but with a golden-yellow crown instead of jet black — *safi sana*!

What was also great to see were some of the Palaearctic migrants that really only visit West Africa — such as Melodious Warblers, Common Redshank, Red Knot and Sandwich Terns. The waterbirds were seen at an enclosed lagoon not far to the east of Accra, where huge numbers of migrant waders and terns congregate during the northern winter. There large numbers of Whimbrel and godwits, and we also saw a skua species (either Pomerine or Arctic) off shore, from the bus as we were driving along the beach road near the lagoon. Unfortunately the driver wasn't a birder and so didn't realise that when someone shouts "SKUA!" you should slam on the brakes and haul out the 'scopes in order to get a good eyeball-full of the bird (especially if you are from East Africa where skuas are few and far between!). Squeals of anguish followed as he kept driving... but to no avail!

For those who weren't able to stay on after the congress for some more manic moments of birding, the time at least finished in style whilst we were queuing for at the buffet banquet laid on beside the swimming pool of the Shangri-La Hotel. Lavish food and deep ornithology-talk were instantly forgotten when a Long-tailed Nightjar sailed in over our heads, circled over the pool and dipped down to take a sip of water from the surface... talk about performing! — *Colin Jackson, P O Box 40658, Nairobi*

Forest fragmentation in the Taita Hills: its effects on the fauna

Luc Lens and Marc De Meyer.

Biology Department, University of Antwerp,
B-2610 Wilrijk, Belgium, and
National Museums, P O Box 40658, Nairobi

February 1997 will mark the official start of field work for the three-year project 'Biodiversity of Taita Hills; zoo-geographical position and impact of habitat fragmentation'. The project is largely funded by the Belgium government through the University of Antwerp, but with considerable input from two Kenyan counterparts, Kenyatta University and the National Museums of Kenya. Apart from an investigation of the biodiversity of Taita Hills through a focus on birds, insects and small mammals, the project aims to transfer knowledge and provide training in biodiversity and applied ecology through an MSc. programme in Animal Ecology at Kenyatta University.

The bird part of the study aims to investigate the population dynamics and genetic structure of a group of Taita species that differ in threat status, level of habitat restriction and mobility. The findings will be linked with the heavily-fragmented nature of the landscape in this remarkable and unique mountainous area of Kenya. This will be done through a detailed study of the effects of habitat structure and fragmentation on both the morphology and behaviour of individually-marked birds of the following species: Taita Thrush, Taita Apalis, Taita White-eye, Orange Ground Thrush, White-starred Robin, Placid Greenbul, Stripe-cheeked Greenbul and Yellow-throated Woodland Warbler. The choice of target species is based on the findings of the team led by Thomas Brooks (Tennessee University) during its survey in the hills (see Kenya Birds 5(1)).

The bird work involves a number of different levels of data collection, from the broad and general to the focused and specific. A ringing team, consisting of two ornithologists, will be working in a number of fragments scattered across the Taita Hills, collecting detailed morphological data and blood samples from the target species, for DNA and parasite analysis. They will also colour-ring the target birds they catch, to enable movements to be tracked more easily. At the same time, Edward Waiyaki of the Department of Ornithology will conduct an in-depth study on the ecology of the Taita Thrush — probably the most threatened of the suite of Taita species — in a number of selected sites, as part of his PhD

Stripe-cheeked Greenbul — *Roger Barnes*

fieldwork. In addition, Mwangi Githiru will focus on frugivory and the role of birds as seed dispersers (and whether fragmentation affects this) as part of an MSc thesis at Kenyatta University. We also hope that John Kageche will link in with the project with an ecological study of Taita White-eyes, for an MPhil degree at Moi University. The White-eyes present an interesting contrast to the Taita Thrush, being more widespread and apparently much better able to adapt to habitat disturbance.

Whereas future field work will certainly yield most interesting scientific results — from the perspectives of insects and mammals as well as birds — the main aim of the project remains to produce recommendations for a sustainable management plan for the area, taking into consideration the needs and requirements of the local communities. It is hoped that the project will at least provide some baseline data that might contribute to the chances of survival of some of its precious and elusive inhabitants.

The East African Wild Life Society's Taita Hills Project

Michael Gachanja
EAWLS, P O Box 20110, Nairobi

Kenya's Taita Hills Forests are the northernmost extension of the Eastern Arc forests of Tanzania. These ecologically isolated and scattered forests represent the region's last remaining significant area of cloud forest. They provide a rich and diverse ecosystem with a wide variety of endemic species. However, this

fertile land is also attractive to the growing population and the little forest cover that remains is threatened by spreading agriculture.

Recognising that these forests are among the most endangered in Kenya, the East African Wild Life Society and the National Museums of Kenya, with funding from the World Wide Fund for Nature (WWF) and the World Conservation Union (IUCN), undertook a one-month research survey in the area in 1984. This identified 13 taxa of plants and nine of animals that are endemic to this region. Among the endemic plants is a species of wild coffee (*Coffea fadenii*). Further, 22 plant species and at least 3 animal species represent the rare Eastern Arc flora and fauna only known in Kenya and Tanzania. Thirty-seven species of plants in the Taita Hills are rare in Kenya and in the world at large.

Since 1984, the forests have continued to shrink to a few small patches. This instigated the society to implement the first phase of a project entitled 'The Biodiversity Conservation of Taita Hills Ecosystem'. The project was implemented in March 1995 and ran for 15 months. Its components included compilation of biological and social-economic literature on the Taita Hills, and public awareness campaigns at various community levels. Project activities culminated in a three-day workshop at Taita-Wundanyi Farmers Training Centre from 22-26 November 1996. The theme was 'Sustainable resource management: forests and people,' and it brought together different actors interested in forest conservation from within and outside Taita-Taveta District.

At the end of the three days, the participants came up with management, community and research recommendations for the sustainable conservation of the forests. These included:

- The need for tapping and recording indigenous knowledge on natural resource use, and documenting all information on Taita Hills forests.
- The need of reviewing management structures on forest conservation within Taita-Taveta District so as to involve all stakeholders and interested parties.
- The need for initiating a Memorandum of Understanding between the Forestry Department, local Taita communities and other stakeholders such as County Councils and NGOs, so as to ensure sustainable utilisation of forest resources through implementing environmentally friendly income-generating activities.
- The need for promoting a people friendly integrated forest management programme.
- The need for initiating actions to save threatened forests and exploring possibilities of protecting endangered species.
- The need for establishing the status of forest boundaries and resolving anomalies and conflicts with participating parties across the board.

- The need for conducting a study on water resources and harvesting potential in reference to run-off and river flow.
- The need for undertaking vegetation survey, soil survey, ethnobotanical and zoological studies, hydrological survey and socio-economic surveys.

From the recommendations made, the Society is implementing the second phase of the project which is anticipated to run for two years starting February 1997. This phase targets Chawia, Ngangao, Vuria and Mbololo forests and will:

(1) Enhance conservation of forest resources through raising environmental awareness and strengthening capacity of local institutions.
(2) Document non-timber product activities being carried out in the area by local communities and other institutions.
(3) Gather information that can be used in drawing up an integrated conservation plan incorporating sustainable pilot collaboration management activities.

Through this phase the society hopes to initiate actions and mechanisms that will enable the local people to take measures that will halt the degradation of the forests and enable them to share in various economic and social-cultural benefits that the forests provide.

The Ahero heronries: problems and solutions

Jeam Agutu
Maseno School, P O Box 120, Maseno

The site and its history

The Ahero heronries are today the single most important waterbird nesting site in the Kisumu area of Lake Victoria. Ahero is the only remnant of the area's once thriving chain of colonial heronries, which included the now dormant Orongo bird sanctuary by the lake shore.

"Too many birds, too few trees" sums up the scenario at the onset of the breeding season in March. Every tree in the area is dotted with hundreds of noisy birds, all busy bringing in grass, moss and sticks for the construction of their bulky nests. In 1996, between 1,000 and 1,500 birds of 10 different waterbird species had been part of the mayhem of the breeding colonies over a nine-month period.

The Ahero heronries are situated 1.5 km from Ahero centre off the Ahero-Ombeyi-Miwani rural access road 15 km south-east of Kisumu. The birds nest on scattered trees within the village of Obiayo, in an area covering about 2-3 acres. A total of eight families are long-term residents here, mainly dependent on commercial rice growing in the Ahero scheme.

The settlement of the Ka-Noo people in this area dates back many years, to the large-scale migration and settlement of Kenyan communities. In 1970 they were approached by the National Irrigation Board (NIB), who were planning to introduce a commercial rice-growing programme. Systematic introduction of rice farming among the Kakola and Kolwa clans (now the names of sub-locations) followed.

The land on the scheme is owned by the local people, but, under an agreement reached in 1970, the NIB handles all inputs to the scheme and marketing of the rice. Recently, the residents have been in dispute with the NIB over the terms of the agreement, which has brought them into confrontation with the Provincial Administration as well. Many farmers have refused to tend their rice farms: thus at the end of 1996, only 200 ha of the 1000 ha scheme were under rice. These recent problems made it difficult at first to discuss the heronry with the local people or even visit the site. However, the eight families involved have now accepted my involvement and come to understand my interest in the birds and their conservation.

Birds versus people

Just 14 trees in the heronry play host to the breeding birds each year. They include *Acacia* and *Eucalyptus* species, *Syzygium cuminii*, *Ficus capensis* and mango. In 1996, breeding started in the first week of March and did not end until the last week of November. Different species bred at different times — competition apparently forcing the less dominant or numerous species to wait until last. The following are the species in the order in which they started breeding, and the approximate number of nests counted over the whole season: Black-headed Heron (300), Cattle Egret (400), Long-tailed Cormorant (51), Great Egret (104), Yellow-billed Egret (172), Little Egret (102), Yellow-billed Stork (5), Sacred Ibis (100), African Spoonbill (49) and African Open-billed Stork (95).

The Ahero heronries have been active for 20 years, but the level of use by the birds has almost doubled in the last decade. This is a consequence of the destruction and eventual collapse of the heronries at Orongo and Kisumu, and of course the increase in rice growing, which gave the assurance of plenty of food even outside the rainy season.

The future of the Ahero heronries themselves is now threatened. The trees that they nest in continue to be felled for fuel, building and making room for cultivation. The most important reason, though, is to discourage the birds from nesting. There are many reasons why people dislike the birds and would be happy if they moved somewhere else:

- The nesting birds are very noisy.
- Bird guano stinks, corrodes roofing sheets and destroys crops.

- The nesting birds attract other problem animals, such as monitor lizards, snakes, mongooses and wild cats.
- Regurgitated food falls to the ground, creating a noisome mess that contains sharp bones from fish, snakes and rats, and is a danger to people (especially children) walking nearby.
- Young birds fall from the nests and die. The bodies decompose and smell terrible.
- Birds nesting on the acacias break thorny twigs that fall to the ground and become a menace to walkers.
- The birds interfere with the collection of fruits from the *Syzygium cuminii* ('jamna'), which are harvested and sold at the local market or in Kisumu.
- Some people are superstitious about the birds. One farmer, Henry Lusi, who has many birds nesting at his home, was accused of being a wizard who had powers to keep the birds in his compound. His family later lopped several trees to discourage the birds from nesting.

The other problem in 1996 was the dispute between the NIB and the farmers. The birds rely on the nearby rice paddies for food. It is because only a few farms were under cultivation in 1996 that the breeding season extended right into November. Since both the NIB and the farmers rely so much on rice-growing, it seems likely that the dispute will be resolved fairly quickly.

"These birds will never leave our compounds" says Okuta Adolo, a sentiment echoed by other landowners. Many of them have tried every possible means to discourage the birds from nesting, but they always return.

Solutions

How can the conflict between birds and people be resolved?

- Conservation education is needed to help the people learn to appreciate the heronries for the rare wonders that they are. This would be directed towards the villagers and the pupils of Obiayo Primary School (where a large tree was recently hewn down to discourage nesting).
- All the landowners seem willing to assist in setting up alternative nesting places for the birds. A new site needs to be identified near the existing heronries and the rice paddies, but away from the village. Fast-growing trees could be planted here, and experiments made with artificial nest-sites mounted on poles.
- In the meantime, the villagers should be asked to let the birds breed in peace while the new area is being developed. The heronry is a site of great potential interest to birdwatchers, and could be included in the western Kenya tourist circuit (e.g. for visitors to Kakamega Forest and Kisumu).

What is happening to Naivasha's Fish Eagles?

Munir Virani, Russell Thorstrom and David Harper
c/o Elsamere Conservation Centre, P O Box 1497, Naivasha

As part of the ongoing studies on Lake Naivasha funded by Earthwatch, the Aga Khan Foundation, the Peregrine Fund Inc.(World Centre for Birds of Prey), and the Elsamere Conservation Centre, we have investigated the apparent lack of breeding success by the African Fish Eagles *Haliaeetus vocifer* at the lake. This species, a close cousin of the American Bald Eagle *H. leucocephalus*, continues to intrigue scientists and bird-watchers alike because of its majestic voice and appearance, and its high density along the Naivasha shoreline — the highest in Africa.

The adult population appears to have been relatively stable over the last two years at around 95 individuals (which may equate to approximately 55 pairs), but the numbers of young produced over this time have been extremely low. Only six recently-fledged juveniles were seen during 1995 and only two in 1996. This gives a mean juvenile proportion of 4% for both years. The late Leslie Brown, who studied the African Fish Eagles for many years, found juvenile/immature proportions of 19.7% during his counts of 1968-69. In addition to the eagles apparently not breeding, there is also evidence that their overall numbers at Lake Naivasha has declined over the last 25 years. For example, in Leslie Brown's paper "Population structure and dynamics in the African Fish Eagle at Lake Naivasha, Kenya" (*E. Afr. Wild. J.* 1973, Vol 11, pages 255-269), he obtained a mean total fish eagle population of 184 individuals (over 12 counts). In 1987, Andrew Smart (in "Density and distribution of the Fish Eagle on Lakes Naivasha and Oloidien, Kenya", *Scopus* 14: pages 76-83, May 1991) obtained a mean total fish eagle population of 158 (over three counts). Our counts of 1995-96 show a mean total fish eagle population of 95 (20 counts) on Lake Naivasha. Continuously observed pairs, such as the two that occur on either side of the Elsamere jetty, bear out this trend: neither have bred in five years. Other riparian land owners, such as Joan Root, have not seen their pair of eagles breed in over nine years.

There are many theories as to why the fish eagles of Lake Naivasha may not be breeding as they used to 25 years ago:

(1) Over the last twenty five years, the Lake Naivasha area has seen profound changes and development in terms of human activity. Large and small farms involved in horticultural or livestock activities have mushroomed. This increase in intensive farming brings concern over the use of pesticides — many of which have been banned in developed countries but still manage to find their way to Kenya. The knowledge

that organochlorines such as DDT, dieldrin and aldrin cause egg-shell thinning in raptors, especially fish-eating species, is quite well documented in temperate countries. However, there is also a theory that, in the tropics, organochlorines degrade rapidly into harmless by-products and hence may not be responsible for the lack of breeding in the fish eagles here at Lake Naivasha.

(2) The flora and fauna of the lake have also changed over the years. All the fish species presently found in the lake have been introduced earlier this century. Prior to that, the fish eagles were believed (and are still seen) to hunt on the large coot population that existed in the lake. Up to 1982, and again in 1987-90, large concentrations of coot were present around the lake. Coot mainly feed on the submerged vegetation and form an important part of the fish eagle's diet. After the introduction of the Louisiana crayfish in 1974, the floating water lilies that dominated the lake surface in the shallow lagoons typical of Lake Naivasha began to disappear. The crayfish were partly responsible for the decimation of the water lilies, and are certainly responsible for preventing their return. Crayfish also feed on the submerged vegetation and hence may have out-competed the coot which are now found only in small numbers, scattered around the lake. Following the disappearance of the water lilies, the introduced aquatic weed *Salviniamolesta* became predominant and covered substantial parts of the lake's surface during the mid-1980s. This may have affected fish eagle hunting, since the weed prevented the birds sighting the fish below the mats. The disappearance of *Salvinia* (thanks partly to the introduction of an Australian beetle, partly to continuous declines in lake levels in the 1990s), has coincided with the rise in another water weed, the Water Hyacinth *Eichhornia crassipes*. This first appeared in the lake in 1988 and is now predominant over most parts of the shoreline. Unlike the situation in Lake Victoria, the Water Hyacinth at Naivasha grows very slowly due to the low temperatures, and will never take over the lake as some people fear. However, the floating hyacinth mats provide the second most important perching sites for the fish eagles after the fever-trees *Acacia xanthophloea* on the shoreline.

(3) Large tracts of papyrus fringes around the lake are being burnt deliberately (by fish poachers) and this might affect prey availability. The lake is also being over-fished and as a result, the fish eagles may not be getting enough food to get into breeding condition.

(4) There is new concern about certain chemicals that mimic the hormone oestrogen and are finding their way into aquatic environments. In temperate countries, increasing levels of oestrogen in aquatic environments are causing male fish to feminise; in Florida, male alligators in have been found to have deformed penises, while female terns are pairing and courting with one another. It would be worthwhile to investigate oestrogen levels in the fish eagles.

(5) Leslie Brown also suggested that fish eagle pairs at Lake Naivasha are so close to one another that they spend all day calling and defending their tiny stretches

of territories. As a result, he found that each pair produces on average just 0.5 chicks per year. With approximately 55 pairs around the lake, though, we should still be seeing at least 25 juveniles.

(6) Other theories about human persecution, felling of shoreline riparian forest, fluctuating water levels and localised cases of poisoning have also been put forward, and should also be investigated.

During the first two weeks of February 1997, Munir Virani and Peregrine Fund biologist Russell Thorstrom, assisted by Elsamere staff Chege and Alfred, embarked on a fish-eagle trapping programme. The idea was to obtain blood samples for analyses as well as to colour-band individual birds for future identification and monitoring. A total of 12 fish eagles (seven males and five females) were banded and released. Alarmingly, over three-quarters of the individuals caught appeared to be underweight. On average, males should weigh approximately 2.7 kg while females should weigh over 3 kg. The biologists caught one male and one female with weights of 2.1 kg and 2.7 kg respectively. This strongly suggests that the fish eagles may be limited by the amount of food available. The eagles may be food-stressed and thus cannot gain enough weight to get into breeding condition.

Further attempts will be made in 1997 to band as many fish eagles as possible to determine how fast the birds are replaced. The lake may be acting as a 'sink' where fish eagles are dying (due to unknown causes) but are rapidly replaced by fish eagles without suitable territories, either birds from neighbouring areas or wanderers.

Other objectives during the course of this year will be to:

- search for active nests and determine whether eggs are being laid;
- determine the causes of nest failures;
- collect data on the birds' nest site characteristics;
- obtain more blood samples and analyse for oestrogen and heavy metals such as mercury;
- collect data about fish stocks;
- establish a fish eagle 'adoption' programme, whereby riparian owners living around Lake Naivasha would 'register' their pairs of fish eagles and spend a few hours a week observing them for any signs of breeding and/or other activities.

Munir Virani (Peregrine Fund Kenya Project, Aga Khan Foundation, Earthwatch and National Museums of Kenya) is conducting research on birds of prey in the Lake Naivasha area for his PhD from the University of Leicester (UK). Russell Thorstrom is a raptor biologist from the Peregrine Fund Inc. World Centre for Birds of Prey, Boise, Idaho, USA. Dr David Harper is at the Department of Zoology, University of Leicester (UK) and also the Principal Investigator for the Naivasha Earthwatch Project.

Van Perlo

Corrections Corner no. 1

Colin Jackson
P O Box 40658, Nairobi

The relatively new Collins 'Illustrated Checklist to the birds of east Africa' by Ber van Perlo has already been reviewed in *Kenya Birds* (see vol. 4 (2): 105-108). Many people have found the book a very useful addition to the field guides available for East Africa — but it does contain quite a few mistakes in the text, plates and maps. Some of these problems have already been highlighted (see *Kenya Birds* vol. 5 (1): 21-23), but there are many more, some major, some minor!

This 'corrections corner' will draw attention to mistakes that book users discover — incorrect colours on the plates, text that is clearly wrong, wrong or mis-numbered maps, and so on. By noting these errors in their copies, we hope that *Kenya Birds* readers can make the book more useful for their birding, and avoid being misled into wrong identifications. If Collins ever puts out a second edition, perhaps these corrections will be taken into account as well.

So, please send in any errors that you've found, for publication in Corrections Corner no. 2. To start the ball rolling, here are a few obviously misleading cases that we have noted:

Plate **39.17**, Ring-necked Dove.

Problem: The text suggests that this species only occurs below 2,000 m altitude. While its main range is at lower levels, this dove can be common at high altitudes too — for instance on the Kinangop Plateau at 2,400 to 2,500 m.

Plate **50.11**, Crowned Hornbill

Problem: The plate shows the colour of the upperparts and breast too brown — they should be blackish.

Plate **83.7**, Uluguru Bush-Shrike

Problem: The text does not indicate that the species is endemic to Tanzania — in fact, it only occurs in the Uluguru Mountains in Tanzania, as shown by the map.

Plate **83.8**, Lagden's Bush-Shrike

Problem: The text describes it as a Tanzanian endemic — in fact it is found in south-western Uganda, as the map shows — the text has been transposed with that for the Uluguru Bush-Shrike (see above)

Plate **87.4**, Red-billed Oxpecker

Problem: The plate shows the rump as pale, contrasting with the mantle —

in fact it should be brown, and uniform with back and mantle. The Yellow-billed Oxpecker has a contrasting pale rump.

Plate **89.8**, Large Golden Weaver (standard name: Holub's Golden Weaver)

Problem: The plate shows the male's breast as yellow, uniform with the head and belly — in fact, the breast should be a rich golden colour, contrasting with the yellow head.

Plate **89.16**, Lesser Masked Weaver

Problem: The plate and the text indicate that the eye-colour is brown — in fact, adults have pale yellowish-white eyes, which is a very useful characteristic for distinguishing this species from the similar Vitelline Masked Weaver.

Plate **90.2**, Clarke's Weaver

Problem: The text states: "Not social (breeds in single pairs)" — in fact, nothing is so far known about the breeding of this species (its nest has yet to be described!). Also, one can at times find flocks of up to 300 birds together in Arabuko-Sokoke Forest.

Plate **90.21**, Grosbeak Weaver

Problem: The plate shows a male weaver with a brown head, which is correct for the western race *melanota* that occurs in Uganda, north-west Tanzania and western Kenya. However, birds in central and eastern Kenya have a black head (the races *concolor* and *montana*), but this is not indicated in the text or the plate.

Threatened birds of Kenya
9: Taita Thrush

Thomas Brooks, P.O. Box 40658, Nairobi

The 1994 publication of "Birds to Watch 2" by BirdLife International launched the Taita Hills into conservation infamy, for BirdLife decided, quite rightly, that no less than three very distinctive races of birds found only in the Taita Hills should be given the status of full species. Not only this, but due to the massive deforestation that has swept the Taitas over the last half century, BirdLife listed all three "new" species as "Critical"—having a 50% chance of extinction within the next five years.

Of the three, the most notable is the Taita Thrush *Turdus helleri*. This species is much rarer than the other two, Taita Apalis *Apalis fuscigularis* and Taita White-eye *Zosterops silvanus*, which are in any case still treated as subspecies of, respectively, Bar-throated Apalis *Apalis thoracica* and Montane White-eye

Zosterops poliogaster in the new "Birds of Kenya and Northern Tanzania" (Zimmerman *et al.* 1996, Russel Friedmann Books CC, South Africa). In contrast, there is now a general consensus that the Taita Thrush is a separate species from Olive Thrush *Turdus olivaceus*.

The Taita Thrush is known from only three tiny forest patches in the Taita Hills: Mbololo (about 200 ha), Ngangao (about 100 ha), and Chawia (about 50 ha), where it was only discovered during our research in July-August 1996. Reports of the thrush from Mt Kasigau, 50 km south-east of the Taita Hills, need confirmation. The three forests lie between 1,500 m and 2,000 m altitude, and are montane in character, having once been dominated by tree species such as *Podocarpus* and *Ocotea*. However, all three have been logged quite heavily, and Ngangao and Chawia are now dominated by species such as *Tabernaemontana stapfiana* and *Albizia gummifera*. Mbololo remains the least disturbed and still holds some trees with circumferences of up to 20 ft, but, in contrast, Chawia is very shrubby in character, with a broken canopy and an understorey dominated by indicators of disturbance like *Dracaena afromontana*.

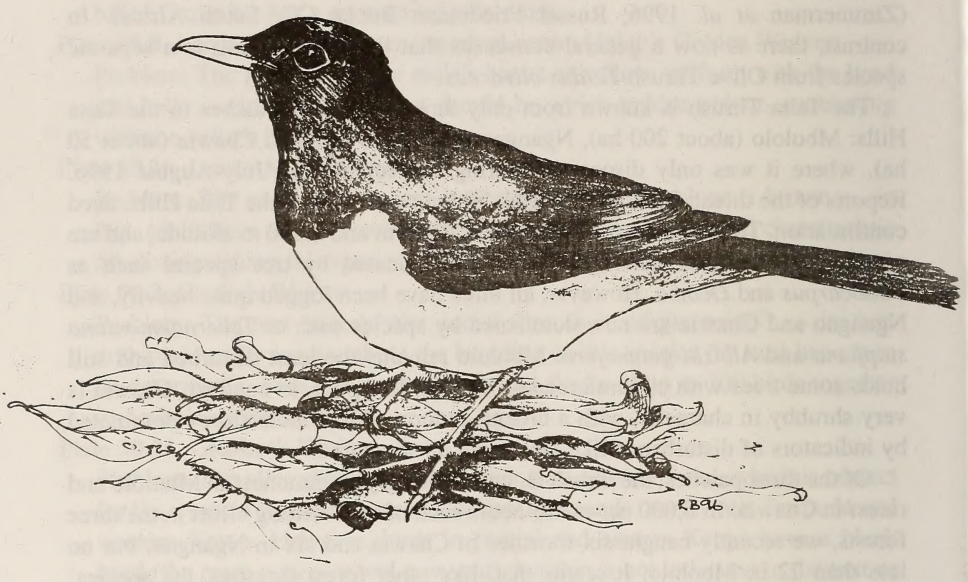
Of the three patches, the thrush is, unsurprisingly, commonest in Mbololo and rarest in Chawia. In 6,000 net-metre-hours each of mist-netting effort in the three forests, we recently caught six thrushes in Chawia and six in Ngangao, but no less than 22 in Mbololo. It seems that, like other forest thrushes, the species' preference is for a shady understorey beneath a dense canopy.

The Taita Thrush is a large, boldly-plumaged bird, with a very dark grey head, upperparts, throat and breast, bright orange flanks and a white belly and undercoverts. Its bill, orbital ring and feet are bright orange and its eyes dark brown. Immature birds are easily recognised by heavy mottling on the breast, head, mantle and wing coverts.

The ecology of the species is still very poorly known. Fruits certainly make up a considerable proportion of its diet, and a loose flock of eleven birds were seen in an area of fruiting trees on the forest edge at Mbololo, feeding on berries dropped by foraging Stripe-cheeked Greenbuls *Andropadus milanjensis*. Birds are almost always seen on the ground, generally being first located by the rustling of leaves as they toss over the leaf litter.

The song of the Taita Thrush, most often heard at dusk, is short, but loud, musical and flute-like: it appears that no tape-recordings have yet been made. Birds also have two alarm calls, a single sharp note (often made in as one birds chases another, possibly in territorial dispute) and a short rattle.

The association of the species with the Orange Ground Thrush *Zoothera gurneyi*, the other forest thrush found in the Taita Hills, is interesting. It has previously been speculated that the two species use different micro-habitats in the Taita Hills forests, with Orange Ground Thrushes being restricted to more



Taita Thrush — *Roger Barnes*

disturbed forest. However, we found Orange Ground Thrushes only in the similar deep forest, often in exactly the same areas as Taita Thrushes. We caught five Orange Ground Thrushes at Ngangao, none at Chawia and only one at Mbololo (although it has previously been reported to be common there), which does not seem to cast any further light on the association between the two.

The future of the Taita Thrush is uncertain. While the Forest Department, happily, now appears to be carefully safeguarding the remaining fragments of the Taita Hills forests, the total habitat of the species now covers less than 5 sq. km, and its global population cannot be more than a few hundred. Good news, however, is that the Taita Hills are now the focus of a major National Museums of Kenya project, which will include a large ornithology component, and so hopefully the information required to plan a successful conservation policy for the thrush and the other Taita Hills endemics will soon be forthcoming.

Acknowledgements. I would like to thank Jim Barnes, Roger Barnes, David Gitau, Silvester Karimi, John Kageche and Christine Wilder for their help in the field in the Taita Hills.

Events and Announcements

Wednesday Morning Bird Walks led by Fleur Ng'weno and Damaris Rotich continue weekly. Meet at 8:45 am at the National Museums entrance for a walk in the Nairobi area. These walks are for EANHS members: non-members are welcome but requested to join the Society (see below).

WORLD BIRDWATCH '97, 4–5 October 1997. Contact BirdLife Kenya for details.

The East Africa Natural History Society offers lectures, excursions and publications with a strong bird focus and organises ringing and nest record schemes in Eastern Africa. For membership details: tel. 749957, or write to the Hon. Secretary, EANHS, P O Box 44486 Nairobi. The office at the National Museums of Kenya is open each weekday 09:30 to 16:00 (closed Friday afternoon).

For sale in the EANHS office: **Birds of Kenya and northern Tanzania**, by Zimmerman, Turner and Pearson — very special members' price KSh 2950/=. Also BirdLife T-shirts, 'I'd rather be birding' stickers, plus books, cards, posters...

National Birdmap. The Ornithology Department's biogeographic database needs YOUR bird records!! For your free National Birdmap checklists, contact Colin Jackson.

Birding Hotline! Feeling twitchy? The EANHS is running an experimental birding info service. Phone on Nairobi 749957 for the latest on what's been seen where — and to report any unusual records.

Scopus, the lively regional journal of ornithology, is published by the EANHS Ornithological Sub-committee. Contact Don Turner, P O Box 48019, Nairobi, Kenya (tel. Nairobi 48133). Annual subscription KSh 600 (KSh 650 up-country); write for overseas rates. Records are welcomed for the East African Bird Report which is published in *Scopus*.

African Bird Club. The ABC produces an excellent colour Bulletin and provides a worldwide focus for African ornithology. For membership details, write to: African Bird Club, c/o BirdLife International, Wellbrook Court, Girton Rd., Cambridge CB3 0NA, UK. Membership presently costs UK £12 per year.

EANHS Nest Record Card Scheme. For information and cards, contact the acting Nest Record Scheme Organiser, Colin Jackson, at the Department of Ornithology, National Museums of Kenya (address below).

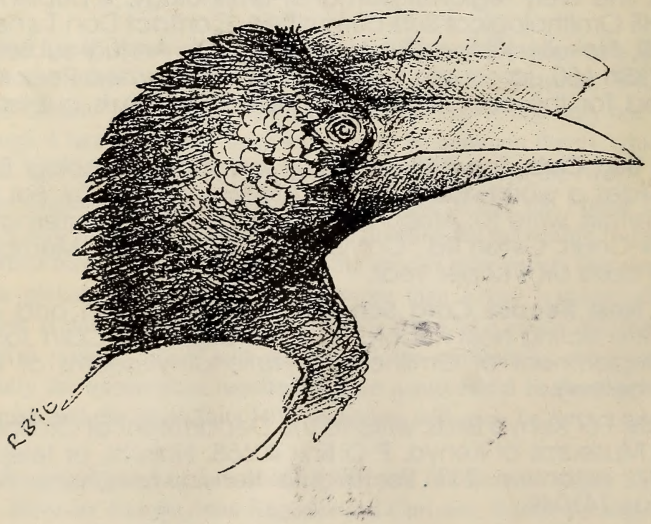
Contacts: For *Kenya Birds*, write to the Department of Ornithology, National Museums of Kenya, P O Box 40658, Nairobi, or telephone 742131/61, extension 243. For BirdLife Kenya, telephone Nairobi 749957; fax 741049.

SMITHSONIAN INSTITUTION LIBRARIES
3 9088 00997 3009

Kenya Birds, Volume 5, Number 2: January 1997

Contents

Editorial vi
News from Kenya and abroad 49
Birding in...the Taita Hills 63
Records 69
Notes 82
Probable versus confirmed breeding records: what's the difference? 82
The last record of the Lammergeier in Hell's Gate? 84
Birding in Northern Kenya—some new records 85
Barred Owlets take the plunge! 88
Manic birding moments at the 9th PAOC 90
Forest fragmentation in the Taita Hills: its effects on the fauna 92
The East African Wildlife Society's Taita Hills Project 93
The Ahero heronries: problems and solutions 95
What is happening to Naivasha's Fish Eagles? 98
Van Perlo Corrections Corner no. 1 101
Threatened birds of Kenya 9: Taita Thrush 102
Events and announcements vii



Silvery-cheeked Hornbill — *Roger Barnes*